



The Boy
Captain

BY JAMES OTIS

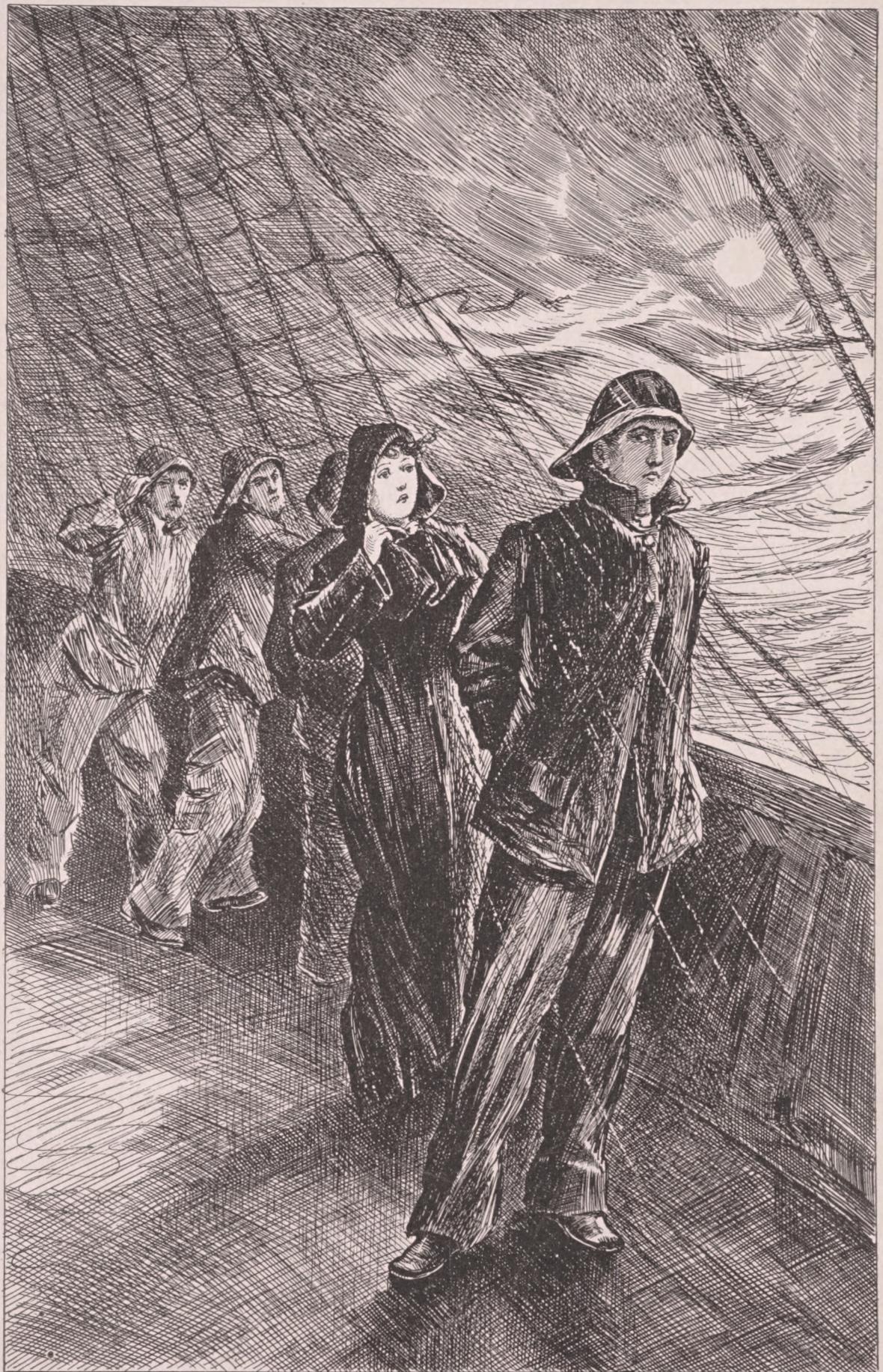


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“BEN STOOD ON THE QUARTER-DECK IN SILENCE.”

THE BOY CAPTAIN

OR

FROM FORECASTLE TO CABIN

BY

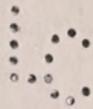
JAMES OTIS *psend.*

AUTHOR OF

“JENNIE WREN’S BOARDING HOUSE”

“THE BOYS’ REVOLT,” “JERRY’S FAMILY”

“THE BOYS OF 1745,” ETC.



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Colonial Press:
C. H. Simonds & Co., Boston, Mass., U. S. A.
Electrotypes by Geo. C. Scott & Sons

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THE BOY CAPTAIN

THE BOY CAPTAIN

OR

FROM FORECASTLE TO CABIN

CHAPTER I.

AN IMAGINARY SHIPWRECK.

THE ship *Sportsman*, from New York for Hong Kong, had, on this particular morning in January, nearly completed what had thus far proven a most uneventful voyage.

The youngest sailor on board, who was the son of the captain and lacking a few months of being twenty-one years old, was looking forward eagerly to this his first visit to China.

Although having performed his duties as one of the crew during two years and a half, he had seen nothing especially strange or wonderful in those ports which the *Sportsman* visited; but the very name "Hong Kong" was associated with such grotesque things as green dragons with red tails, kites fashioned in fantastic shapes, and the oddest kind of odd people in the most impossible of

attitudes, as pictured on tea-chests, or in the curios to be seen in the shop windows at home.

And now just a word by way of preface regarding this same boy, who appeared on the ship's papers as "Benjamin Thompson, able seaman."

Captain William Thompson, commander of the *Sportsman*, had allowed his son to sign the articles, with the understanding that he should be treated exactly as any other member of the crew, and no favour shown because of his relationship, except, possibly, while they might be in port. Ben's father was very strict on this point, saying many times that, since he himself had worked his way aft in regular stages from the forecastle, he did not intend "his son should crawl through the cabin windows."

The boy had also promised faithfully that he would, in addition to his duties as a sailor, study very hard to fit himself for the position of officer in the merchant service.

Ben was not particularly charmed with the life after having had a six months' taste of it. Although his father had expressly defined the station on board which he was to occupy, Ben possibly fancied the strings would not be drawn very tightly over the captain's son ; but in this he had made a woeful mistake.

If anything, his father had been more strict than a stranger would have been, and was rigid in adhering to the rule requiring of him a certain amount of study in the way of navigation and seamanship, which added very materially to his labours.

It must be said in Ben's favour that he never shirked

his work nor his studies, and the natural result was that on this day, thirty months after having begun the battle of life, he was fully competent to fill the position of first officer on board the *Sportsman*, or even to have navigated her himself.

The mates, however, showed greater leniency toward this young member of the crew when the captain was below than they would have done but for the relationship, and, thanks to them, Ben received many hints which enabled him to advance more rapidly in his studies than otherwise might have been the case.

On this particular day, however, the young sailor was looking forward to a visit on shore, rather than speculating as to his present duties or future prospects, and when, at noon, the *Sportsman* was off Macclesfield Bank, with a favouring wind and only three hundred knots more to be made, Ben hoped most earnestly that nothing would occur to prevent the ship's coming to anchor in port in the shortest possible space of time.

He was fully alive to everything going on about him, and when one of the lookout men hailed the quarter-deck with the information that a boat was in sight about four points off the starboard bow, having every appearance of being a ship's long-boat with a wrecked crew, it is just possible he was a trifle impatient, because the *Sportsman's* course was changed to intercept this waif upon the Chinese Ocean.

Running down to investigate matters might not delay the craft many hours; but even though only two were

spent in such work, Ben felt he was being deprived of exactly so much time which might be utilised to both his profit and amusement on shore.

Half an hour later, however, there was no such thought as regret in his mind that the course had been changed, for it could then be seen that the lookout's speculations in regard to the boat were correct.

She carried six men, none of whom looked particularly emaciated, or as if having suffered severely; but the apology for a flag attached to an oar which was raised upright in the bow told that they were in need of assistance, and Ben forgot Hong Kong and its attractions in the knowledge that it was possible to relieve suffering.

In due time the boat was alongside, the men taken on board, and then came, in reply to the captain's question, what all considered rather a suspicious story.

The spokesman of the party represented himself as second mate of the brig *Starlight*, which had foundered the day previous, about fifty miles to the northward of where they were picked up.

While the alleged mate was talking with Captain Thompson, some of the men were being questioned by the second officer, and they stated that the *Starlight* had gone down in a typhoon, afterwards correcting themselves by saying she had struck a reef, and, in fact, each one told a different story on being pressed as to particulars.

The captain's orders were that the men should be taken care of, and then he held a consultation with his chief

mate, which was afterwards repeated to Ben by that officer much as follows :

“ You see, lad, your father don’t take kindly to the yarn that ’ere shell-back has been spinnin’; but at the same time he ain’t willin’ to say it’s all wrong. When it comes to shipwrecked crews sailormen have mighty soft hearts, for there’s no tellin’ when they may be in the same boat.”

“ Is anything to be done toward finding out the truth ? ”

“ Bless your heart, lad, what could be done? The captain don’t want to act suspicious-like, because there’s no reason for sayin’ the story ain’t true. The mate’s yarn would go down well enough if it was n’t for what the rest of the crowd tell. Every one of them makes it out different, and all I’ve got to say is, they must be a set of greenhorns that can’t stick to the same story.”

“ Then you don’t believe what any of them tell ? ” Ben asked.

“ Not a blessed word. It’s just like this, lad, if their craft had gone down, no matter how, it stands to reason they’d know the particulars, — an’ what would be the call for there being any variation of the yarn ? ”

As a matter of course, that was a question Ben could not answer. Very likely some of the crew had told the truth, and he so expressed himself to the mate.

“ There’s no use talking, boy, they’re all lying. My idee of the thing is that they hadn’t got a yarn cooked up when we hove in sight, an’ spent so much time chinnin’ ‘bout what should be told that they were all at sea when

we took 'em aboard. More 'n as likely 's not they 've run away from the ship at Hong Kong, though why they should have hailed us to be carried back to the same port is more 'n I can figger out. 'Cause why? 'Cause they would be nabbed the minute we arrived."

The first officer might have continued to argue with himself for Ben's edification, as to why there should be no reliance placed in the story of either of the alleged shipwrecked men, but for the fact that the boy, tiring of such dry detail and prosy speculation, determined to seek information for himself among those who had been taken on board.

This was not as easy of execution as one might fancy.

The second mate had learned that his companions were not giving the same account of the supposed disaster as himself, and was now doing his best to prevent them from talking with the *Sportsman's* crew.

The rescued ones were neither hungry nor sleepy, although some of them professed to be suffering from lack of rest and food.

The unconsumed provisions in the boat gave the lie to one story, and their general appearance most emphatically denied the other; yet he who called himself their second mate insisted the entire party should be allowed to "turn in" until they had recovered from the effects of exposure and privation.

"Let 'em bunk 'round the deck anywhere," the first officer said when Ben went aft in response to the shipwrecked mate's request, to ask if they could be allowed

the use of the forecastle. "There's no need of their goin' below such weather as this, an' if they're terribly played out, I reckon the soft side of a deck plank will be good enough for any of 'em."

Ben returned to the shipwrecked party and delivered the message; but not in exactly the same words as it had been given to him.

The supposedly weary men could not refuse to lie down, after having represented themselves as being so nearly exhausted, and, much to their leader's chagrin, it became necessary for them to do what probably they had no desire for, namely, to follow the mate's suggestion.

If the commander of the party had been strictly obeyed, Ben's loitering around the deck in the immediate vicinity of the alleged sufferers would have been without avail; but, as it was, the men were not disposed to remain together very long at a time, and the young sailor soon found the desired opportunity.

One of the men being without tobacco, tried to borrow a pipe-full from the fellow who called himself mate, but was refused, and, noting this, Ben fancied he knew of a way to take the successful first step toward winning the sailor's confidence.

Borrowing a piece of tobacco of the chief officer, he went near the deck-house at some distance from the newcomers, and, holding the prize up so the impoverished smoker might see it, beckoned the latter to his side.

"I thought from what your mate said you must be on short allowance. You can have some of this if it will do

you any good; but I don't count on giving you the whole plug."

The man filled his pipe, after going through the formality of returning thanks, cut off a generous supply for the future, and then settled himself down under the lee of the house for a comfortable smoke.

The watch to which Ben belonged was off duty at the time; therefore there was nothing to prevent him from following the fellow's example, and in half an hour the two were on terms almost approaching intimacy.

Quite naturally the young sailor had asked for particulars of the shipwreck, and, equally as naturally, the man had given his version of the affair, allowing himself so much latitude in the way of romance as to make the story entirely different from those which had been previously told.

Ben listened in silence until the sailor had spun his yarn, and was forced to conclude because his imagination refused to serve him longer, when he asked, assuming an expression of the utmost faith and perfect innocence:

"What vessel were you on?"

"The *Starlight*, of course. Haven't I jest been tellin' of you?"

"What craft did the other men belong to?"

"We were shipmates. Did n't you hear what I said?"

"How many times was the *Starlight* wrecked?"

"Look here, lad, how many times do you think a vessel can be wrecked when she goes to the bottom?"

"I thought once was enough for 'most any craft; but

this brig of yours knocks me silly. According to what your crowd has told, she has been run down, struck a reef, foundered from some unknown cause, and been dismasted in a typhoon, all within fifty miles of here, and during the past twenty-four hours."

The sailor looked at Ben a few moments as if trying to decide whether that appearance of innocent faith was natural or assumed, and then, waving his pipe in the air to give greater emphasis to his words, he said slowly :

" See here, my young an' bloomin' shipmate, you're gettin' out of your reckonin'. When an old shell-back like me tells a boy like you what happened yesterday, it all stands for truth, an' he don't want to get himself into a howlin' muss by tryin' to pick flaws in the yarn."

" No, I s'pose not," Ben replied reflectively, as if the matter was something of which he had not thought previously ; " but when an old shell-back like you tells a boy like me a different yarn from what his shipmates have been spinning, it's kind of natural to want the thing explained. I'd like to know just how the *Starlight* did go down."

" Well, you've got it from me straight. It ain't my fault if I've shipped with a lot of green hands what don't know the difference between a collision at sea and a typhoon, is it ? When a man asks me for a true yarn, he gets it. Do you see ? "

" Yes, I see, so give me the yarn."

" What do you mean ? Haven't I jest been tellin' you all about it ? "

"You said when a man asked you for a true yarn, he got it, and that's what I'm after. The first one you told is all right for the marines; but I want to know how your craft foundered, and how you happened to be in that boat?"

Again the man looked at the boy, and appeared as if trying to induce his face to take on an expression of anger in order to intimidate the over-bold questioner.

Ben gazed at him in the most friendly manner possible, and never suggested by so much as the tremor of an eyelid that there was any reason for the honest old salt to be disturbed in mind.

The fact that Ben put aside so completely this story which had been told, as something untrue, caused the alleged suffering seaman to fancy he might be getting both himself and his companions into difficulties by drawing so extensively upon his imagination, without reference to his shipmates' previous statements, and he would have terminated the interview then and there, but for the young sailor.

Ben had no intention of investing fully one-third of Mr. Short's plug of tobacco in such an ill-paying speculation, and, as his companion attempted to rise for the purpose of going forward, he said, in a matter-of-fact tone:

"When Captain Thompson hears that you men couldn't all tell the same story, I've got an idea that things will be pretty warm."

"What kind of a captain is he?"

“Well, I must say he’s a pretty hard one, even if he is my father, when it comes to dealing with such a case as this, for there’s nothing makes him so hot as to be taken for a marine.”

“Is he your father?” the man asked in surprise, not unmixed with fear.

“That’s what he is.”

“But I reckon you have the run of the cabin?”

“I reckon I do,” Ben replied, not a tremor showing that now it was his turn to indulge in a little yarn.

“And you’ve been pumpin’ me jest for the sake of tellin’ him?”

“No, that wasn’t what I started in for; but after hearing what you’ve been trying to stuff down my throat I think it’s time he should know that there’s something wrong among you, and being so well acquainted with him as I am, I’m willing to bet, and would risk a little more than a farthing’s worth of silver spoons, that you’ll stay below after we come to an anchorage, until the consul can be notified.”

All this in the friendliest tone, as if Ben was imparting to his new acquaintance something which it would be particularly pleasing to hear.

The man looked at him yet more curiously, and probably began to think the young fellow was not quite as green, regarding the peculiar methods employed by some seamen while telling a story, as he had at first fancied.

“Look here, lad, there’s no call to go to the captain

with what I said, because, if it 'll do you any good, I 'm willin' to own right up that it was a yarn."

"Oh, yes, I know that," was the reply. "You see there 's been so many different yarns told already that it wasn't necessary for me to listen to you to know there was something wrong about the whole affair."

"Then what did you begin pumpin' me for?"

"I just wanted to know what kind of a tale you 'd make out of it. Some of the rest of your crew are pretty good at such things; but I 'm willin' to say you 're doing yourself proud at this time."

"An' I 'm willin' to say I 'd like to have hold of the collar of your jacket with one hand, and a bit of ratline stuff in the other, for about five minutes."

"Well, so long as you can't have it that way, there 's no use talking of it, so suppose you tell me how the *Starlight* went down, and the name of the craft you really shipped on last?"

The sailor half arose to his feet, gazed around at his friends, and then settled down again as if having decided some question in his own mind.

"Look you, lad, what kind of a trade would you be willin' to make if I should give you the full pertic'lars of our craft?"

"What kind of a trade do you want to make?"

"If it so be that these bloomin' shipmates of mine have n't got sense enough to stick to the yarn we agreed on, then I for one says it 's time to take care of myself. Now I ain't ownin' that sich a thing has got to be done;

but it might be I'd like to leave this 'ere hooker before she'd been at anchor very long."

"And you want to make a trade with me to help you off? Is that it?"

"Well, it might be, an' then agin it might n't."

"Now see here, shipmate, we won't beat about the bush any longer," and the expression of innocent faith on Ben's face was replaced by one of determination. "You're beginning to realise that the whole boiling of you are getting into hot water. In fact, I might say you have already gotten into hot water by being such idiots as to strike out each man for himself in the yarn-telling line. The truth of the story is, it might make trouble for you if known to the consul. Now I'd like to hear it, and if it was the straight tale I'd be willing to see you sneak off in the boat we picked up, some time during my watch, after we arrived in port."

"But it might be you would n't stand the first watch after anchorin'."

"I'll agree to see you get away if you tell me what I want to know."

As if to fortify himself for the confession, the sailor placed carefully in his mouth nearly one-half the stock of tobacco he had taken from the mate's plug, and then began, after first looking around to assure himself his words could not be overheard by any one save his companion.

"This 'ere is the straight log: We deserted from the ship *Progressive Age* night before last; left her without a bloomin' soul aboard but the captain's child an' a nigger

steward. That's all there is about it, except, maybe, that after the captain died off Great Natunas we kind of broached the cabin stores in a way that would n't have pleased the owners."

"Case of living aft, I suppose; making free with that part of the medical stores which comes under the head of grog, sometimes?"

"Well, yes, a little like that, I will admit. You see the first officer died before we come through the Straits of Sunda, an' the captain was sick then. The second mate was in charge; up to that time he had showed himself to be an able seaman, but the mornin' we sewed the old man into his hammock, tiltin' him off the gratin' without any too much ceremony, he got to lushin', an' what was the rest of us to do? We didn't count on givin' him the full swing, do all the work an' let him enjoy himself, without we had our share of the grub, so we took it. Forty days' workin' up through Sunda—I don't mean to say we had much of a hand in it, for the old hooker was takin' care of herself most of the time, and when the mate sobered up a bit, he begun to realise the craft was n't jest fit for port. We headed her for Nampang Island, made everything snug, an' left her where I reckon she'll stay till the owners send out some one to take charge."

"Did n't care to take up your wages?"

"Not much after sich a spree, for we'd found ourselves in the cooler mighty soon after comin' to anchor where there was a consul."

"I should think there might be danger of the natives taking a hand in the matter," Ben suggested.

"Well, I allow there is ; but that's nothin' to us. We want to get a chance to ship on some homeward bound craft, an' the *Progressive Age* can lay there at anchor till the barnacles come aboard, for all I care. You see it was our business to get out of the scrape."

"Are there provisions enough to last the child and the steward till they can send for assistance?"

"I allow they can't starve to death for a while yet ; but she wasn't overly provisioned when we left Sandy Hook, an' they won't get any too fat."

"Do you suppose the steward will have sense enough to send word to Hong Kong?"

"Not a bit of it. He's as 'fraid of a Chinaman as ever St. Patrick was of a snake, an' I allow he'll keep his black head under cover while she lays off Nampang. Now you've got the whole thing, an' I'm countin' on you to help me slip away before the captain can send word to the consul."

"I'll keep my part of the trade, and will see to it that you get off, but the rest of your precious crowd will have to suffer for what they have done."

"That's all right ; I ain't sayin' a word agin it, lad ; they deserve the whole cake. I was kinder drawed into the thing, you see, an' should n't be blamed like the rest."

"How large is the brig?"

"Three hundred an' sixty tons ; square-rigged."

“Be around where I can get hold of you when we draw near the harbour.”

“Don’t you worry ‘bout that, lad, I’ll keep as snug to you as ever a flea did to a dog.”

Ben had heard all he cared to know, and with the knowledge had come a sudden determination, which seemed to him little short of inspiration.

“If I stay with father, it may be ten years before I ever see a chance of commanding a vessel, an’ here’s an opportunity to jump in as captain before I’ve been mate, if I’ve got the nerve to see the thing through. A square-rigged brig; no one aboard but a negro and a child! The chances are ten to one the natives will make off with her before long; but if I can work her up to Hong Kong the owners are bound to give me the full share of the credit. I’ll try it unless father puts his foot down so hard that it’ll be dangerous;” and the young sailor fell to pacing back and forth to leeward of the deck-house, with his hands behind him, studying intently on what, to an elder man, might have seemed a problem which could not be solved unaided.

CHAPTER II.

A SELF-ELECTED CAPTAIN.

DISCIPLINE on board the *Sportsman* was sufficiently strict to prevent Ben, even though he was the captain's son, from venturing upon the quarter-deck without a summons from one of the officers.

After concluding his conversation with the deserter from the *Progressive Age*, it was not necessary he should wait very long before being called aft by Mr. Short, the first officer, who had watched from a distance his efforts to extract information from those who had been picked up.

The mate beckoned for him to approach, and, coming down from the quarter-deck, the two stood near the main entrance of the cabin where the coming of the captain might be observed, for the master of the *Sportsman* would not have been well pleased to see his chief officer holding a confidential conversation with one of the crew.

"Did you find out what you wanted to know?" Mr. Short asked, anxiously.

"Yes; but I shall have to pay his price for it."

"What is that?"

"Pretty near one-third of your plug of tobacco, with the agreement that he shall be able to slip away from the

ship immediately after she arrives in port, and before the consul can get aboard."

"I hope it is n't anything very serious they've been engaged in, lad, or the last part of your trade may get you into trouble."

"If he tells the truth, and I reckon he does, they have simply deserted from a brig which is now at anchor off Nampang Island."

Then Ben repeated to the mate the latter portion of the conversation which he had had with the sailor, in detail, and when he finished Mr. Short said, grimly:

"It's well for that fellow he made the trade with you, otherwise he'd be apt to find himself in trouble mighty soon after we reached Hong Kong."

"How so?" Ben asked, quickly.

"Why, Captain Thompson is no fool, as I reckon we'll both agree on, an' of course I am in duty bound to report that the men are telling different stories in regard to how they happened to beadrift. It won't take him very long to decide what must be done. Before we get to our anchorage I reckon the consul will be notified, an' this 'ere bloomin' crowd what claim to have suffered so much will have a chance to explain matters."

"But I must get this man away, because that is what I promised," Ben said, earnestly.

"How you goin' to do it?"

"I'm counting on your telling me, Mr. Short. You understand best how it can be arranged. There won't be any trouble if you're willing to see the thing through."

"But supposin' it should turn out, after the fellow got clean off, that there had been a mutiny in which the officers were killed? Then how would we feel about having helped him away."

"I'll answer for it that he told the truth. In the first place, it didn't seem as if he was on very good terms with the mate, for he couldn't get what tobacco he wanted, and then again he knows he's in a scrape, therefore is anxious to get out. If there'd been a regular mutiny they wouldn't have allowed themselves to be picked up so near port, for it would have been an easy matter to make their way to Hong Kong along the shore."

"That may be, lad, but when I strike a liar I never believe him, even while he's telling the truth."

"But will you help me to get him away?"

"Yes, I reckon I'll have to now, if you've given your word he shall go. I don't suppose he counts on your providin' him with anything?"

"No; all he wants is to leave the ship."

"He shall have that chance if it's my watch when we arrive, and the captain ain't too sharp for me. But in case we get there early in the forenoon I'm afraid he'll stand a pretty poor show."

"Of course; but that's his own lookout. If we should arrive in the morning he's got sense enough to know I couldn't help him at that time. Now, Mr. Short, there's something else I want to talk about."

"Another Mother Carey's chicken on your hands that you've got to help away?"

“From all accounts I reckon I’ve got two more.”

The mate looked at the boy in surprise, and Ben, fearful lest the conversation should be interrupted before he had said all he wished, added quickly :

“I’ve made up my mind to jump from the forecastle into the cabin by going after that brig, taking her to Hong Kong, and from there home, if possible.”

“You’ve made up what?” the mate asked, in surprise.

Ben repeated the words.

“Well, I’ll be blowed!” and Mr. Short really looked as if he was preparing himself for such an ordeal. He stepped back a few paces, surveyed the young man from head to foot, pursed his lips, gave vent to a prolonged whistle, and Ben was unable to determine if it was expressive of astonishment or scorn. “So you’re countin’ on runnin’ down to Nampang Island, cuttin’ out a brig that’s got for a crew a negro and a child, an’ some fine day slipping across to New York! Well, you ain’t thinkin’ of doin’ much, are you? You don’t want a very big portion of this world, do you? If this is your idea of what a sailor can accomplish after he’s been to sea two years an’ a half, it’s mighty lucky for all hands aboard the *Sportsman* that you have n’t lived in the forecastle any longer, or you’d be takin’ charge of this ‘ere crowd.”

“Now don’t make sport of me, Mr. Short. I can do exactly what I have said, as you know, providing I have the chance, and nobody is any better aware of my ability as a sailor than you. I ask you fairly and squarely if you don’t think it possible?”

“Well, Ben, my boy, I must confess that you could do it as well as I, providin’,—an’ now I want you to listen to the provide. If that ’ere brig was manned and provisioned in proper shape, it could be done by you jest as well as by me. You see she’s owned by the same firm we’re workin’ for now.”

“Owned by the same firm?” Ben repeated, in surprise.

“Yes, lad, an’ I’ve seen her many a time. Your father would n’t hesitate to take charge of her at once, an’ I suppose he will, after he knows the whole story.”

“Then he ’ll have to put a master aboard.”

“That’s true, an’ I allow the second officer will get that job; but perhaps you stand a chance to step into his shoes.”

“And that’s what I don’t choose to do. I want a vessel of my own, and here’s an’ opportunity to get one.”

“I admit there is, my boy; but it strikes me you’re bitin’ off a little more’n you can chew this time. You see it’s jest like this: In the first place your father is bound to send somebody down there, if he finds the consignees in Hong Kong have n’t already done so.”

“It is n’t likely they know where she is, and, besides, she can’t be consigned there, for, if the sailor tells the truth, she’s light.”

“Then what is she doin’ ’round here?”

“I don’t know; but he said she was in ballast, and was n’t provisioned, or, at least, they had broken into her stores until there was precious little left. I reckon they wasted three pounds where they ate one.”

"That stands to reason. Give a sailorman run of the grub, an' you're breakin' the owners mighty quick. Now, Ben, I want to give you a piece of advice. Your father must know this whole story, an' you're bound to tell it. Captain Thompson ain't the kind of a man that would let one of his sailors slip off in the way you count on doin', an' when that sailor happens to be his son, why, boy, there'd be marks of ratline stuff on your back for a month, if he should catch you."

"I suppose there would," Ben replied, ruefully; "but at the same time I'm going to make a try for it. From what you've said I don't suppose you are willing to help me?"

"Not while you're workin' behind your father's back, lad. If he gives the word, you can count on me for all I'm worth."

"But I'll tell him before I go," Ben said, and the mate replied, grimly:

"You will if you're wise, lad; but there's no harm in keepin' your mouth shut until we arrive in port, an' I won't let on that you know any more than the rest of us are supposed to. Get your man into the deck-house when I go off duty, and we'll have another talk with him."

Ben's ardor was slightly dampened by this conversation with Mr. Short; but at the same time his resolution was unchanged.

"I'll go just as far as I can before saying anything to father," he thought, "and then if he sits down on the scheme I can't help myself."

An hour later Mr. Short was off duty, and Ben had made the desired arrangements.

The deserter was in the deck-house where Ben had summoned him for the purpose of consulting as to the best method of his escape from the ship, and, in order that the man might not be alarmed by the coming of the first officer, the boy had explained to him that Mr. Short was to assist in his departure.

"It won't do for me to stay here very long," the sailor said as Mr. Short entered the deck-house, "for if my mate gets on to my tellin' of what has been done, things will be pretty lively."

"I reckon he won't prance 'round this ship very much," the first officer said, grimly; "but at the same time, if you're countin' on leavin' unbeknownst to anybody, I allow it ain't well he should know you are talkin' with us. Now, my man, I want you to give me the same yarn you spun to Ben, an' straight, mind you, or there 'll be trouble."

"I ain't tellin' anything that's crooked," the man replied, in an injured tone.

"Oh, no, I s'pose not. You spun the other yarns jest as straight as this last one, eh?"

"The story I gave the young chap is straight, anyhow," the man replied, doggedly.

"Go ahead with it, then."

The sailor repeated his account of the desertion exactly as he had to Ben, the mate, meanwhile, cross-questioning closely, but without being able to trip him in the slightest particular.

As to why the brig was bound to Hong Kong in ballast, the sailor was unable to say, as a matter of course. He could only describe her location at the time of their leaving, and repeated again that the only persons on board were a negro steward and the captain's child.

"Who's takin' care of the young one?" Mr. Short asked.

"If the nigger ain't doin' it, I reckon things are goin' 'bout as they please. All I was thinkin' of at the time was to get shut of the brig, an' was willin' to let them as we left behind run matters to suit themselves. Now if you've got through with me, sir, I'll go on deck, for I've been here too long already."

Mr. Short motioned toward the door, and the man departed, Ben gazing eagerly into the officer's face as if to ask what he thought of the matter now.

"It stands jest about where it did, lad," the mate replied, as if reading the question in the boy's eyes. "I allow the sailor is tellin' the truth this time, an' yet I don't see as that wild scheme of yours looks any better than it did before. What I said a while ago fits in now, an' I feel like givin' the advice over agin. Do whatever you're a mind to towards gettin' ready for the voyage; but don't really start till you've talked with the captain, an' told him all you know."

From that hour until the *Sportsman* arrived in port, Ben was constantly speculating as to how he might best accomplish that upon which he was determined, and when the ship's anchors were let go he had a definite plan in his mind as to the course which should be pursued.

Fortune favored the man who had turned informer against his companions.

Night had just come on when the ship was moored, and Ben's acquaintance was keenly alive to the fact that he must make his escape before the harbour-master should come aboard.

Mr. Short was on duty, and, in order to forward the scheme, had had two of the boats, in addition to the captain's gig, lowered, one being the craft purporting to have come from the *Progressive Age*.

"If your man don't get away within ten minutes it'll be too late," Mr. Short said in a low tone as he passed Ben, who was leaning over the rail awaiting the developments of his scheme, and the sailor who had particular interest in these arrangements approached at this moment.

The remainder of the work was comparatively easy.

Ben repeated to the man what the mate had said, and added on his own account:

"If you look alive you can get away now without any one's seeing. Stand here, and if I whistle before you're over the rail, lounge forward again."

The sailor made no reply, but disappeared in the gloom, and Ben, after waiting ten minutes, looked over the side.

The boat from the *Progressive Age* had disappeared, and that the man had made good his escape was equally certain, therefore the boy's responsibility in the matter ceased.

Whether the first or second officer had reported to the

captain the discrepancies in the alleged shipwrecked men's stories, Ben did not know; but he heard the order given to have the newcomers secured below, where there would be no opportunity of their being able to gain the shore.

Hardly ten minutes elapsed from the time the informer made his escape before this was done, and the young sailor thought he had reason for believing the chief mate had had some hand in arranging the matter with a view of enabling him to make good his promise.

Although Ben had been so eager to see Hong Kong, he appeared to take no notice of the city on this evening, and, instead of joining his friends among the crew in planning excursions when they should have a day's liberty, spent his time poring over a chart of the China Sea, which had been loaned him by Mr. Short.

On the following morning Captain Thompson went on shore. Ben knew that his first visit would be to the consul's, his second to the agents of the ship, and it was reasonable to suppose the business would be concluded by noon, therefore, when the first officer was in command, he proffered the request for liberty.

As may be fancied, it was readily granted, and with it came a bit of advice.

" You can go, lad, of course; but remember what I say, an' mind your eye."

Ben intended to " mind his eye," and take advantage of every opportunity at the same time. He was in no hurry to land, because he had figured out the probable time which would be spent by his father at the office of the

consignees, and he wished to arrive immediately after the business was concluded.

In this he was successful.

He announced his name and relationship to the master of the *Sportsman*, and the consignee replied, thinking his only business was to see his father :

“Captain Thompson has just left. You will find him at the Hong Kong Hotel.”

“And that is just what I don’t want to do yet awhile, sir,” Ben replied. “I would like to talk with you first, and then I will find him.”

The agent appeared slightly surprised by this remark, but made no comment, and Ben unfolded his scheme without delay.

He related the story of the rescue of the sailors, with which the gentleman had already been made acquainted, and also detailed what he had learned from the informer.

Then he told of his scheme, explaining that he wished to arrange matters, if possible, with the agent, before speaking with his father, and declared that he could get the brig from Nampang Island to Hong Kong without assistance, save from such native sailors as he might be able to pick up.

“And do you think you could navigate her?” the gentleman asked, displaying sufficient interest in the matter to satisfy the young sailor.

“I’m certain of it. It won’t be an easy matter for you to find a captain in port, so why not take me?”

“But I really have no authority in the matter,” the gen-

tleman replied. "We attend to the business of the Messrs. Pierce, but have no instructions regarding the brig *Progressive Age*. Under the circumstances I should hesitate before fitting her for sea until after communicating with the owners."

"That means she would have to lay here a very long while?"

"Exactly; and it would entail much loss. At the same time I should n't feel warranted in doing anything on my own responsibility."

"Don't you suppose the owners would like to have her home?" Ben asked.

"There's no question about it, and very likely would be willing to pay a good round sum. The matter had better be referred to the American consul."

"Then it is n't possible for you to give me any authority in the matter?" Ben asked, in a tone of grievous disappointment.

"No; and yet I am willing to assume this much responsibility: if your father says you are capable of managing such a craft, I'll authorise you to take possession of her wherever she may be — providing she is in such a condition as you describe. Then, upon arriving at Hong Kong, it is possible the matter can be arranged to your satisfaction; but I am afraid not."

"And I have your authority to bring her here?"

"Yes, after I have talked with Captain Thompson."

Ben understood that it would be useless for him to make any further conversation with the agent, and he departed

with all speed to find his father, a task which was not difficult, owing to the fact that the master of the *Sportsman*, having met some friends of his at the hotel, was likely to remain there a long time.

Ben's enthusiasm was quite as great as ever, but he began to have doubts as to the possibility of being allowed to carry into effect what the chief mate had termed "a wild scheme."

It was fully half an hour before he could gain an interview with his father, and then hurriedly, as if time was of the utmost value, he repeated all he had heard from the sailor, and asked of the agent.

Captain Thompson listened to him patiently; made no comments either upon the story or the scheme, and, when Ben had concluded, said severely:

"I make it a rule never to transact business with my men on shore, except at the consul's office. You could have asked to see me at any time on board the *Sportsman* before we came to anchor, but did not choose to do so. Therefore we will defer the matter until I return to the ship. I must say, however, that it would have been more befitting you as a sailor to have given this information to your captain at once, instead of withholding it in order to go to the consignees without his knowledge."

"I am willing to admit that, sir; but at the same time there is some slight excuse for me in the fact that I hoped, if I should gain the consent of the agent to the scheme, you would be more ready to look upon it with favour, than before anything had been done. I am quite

certain, sir, you must have been as eager, when you were young, to rise from the forecastle to the cabin as I am, and, possibly, would have been as willing to risk giving slight offence to your superior officer for the sake of accomplishing your purpose."

Ben delivered this little speech respectfully, but yet very earnestly, and even had there been no kinship between them, there was so much truth in the words that the captain could not fail to receive them in the same spirit in which they were intended.

CHAPTER III.

NAMPANG ISLAND.

BEN did not appear particularly jolly when he came over the side of the ship after his visit ashore, and Mr. Short said, as he stepped on deck :

“ Well, lad, it don’t look as if you had met any too much encouragement since you’ve been gone.”

“ Indeed, I did n’t,” Ben replied, and then he went to the deck-house as if wishing to shut himself out from view of his shipmates while he recovered from the disappointment.

Although his father had not positively refused to allow him to carry out his scheme, he had very little hope of being permitted to attempt it, and his sorrow was as great proportionately as his aim had been high.

Not until half an hour elapsed did he show himself again, and then he could not fail to comment upon the fact that the deserters from the brig were no longer on board.

“ What became of those fellows we picked up?” he asked the steward.

“ They went ashore in irons. I reckon the consul must have sent for them. That second mate will have to post his men better, if he wants to keep out of the jug.”

It seemed as if this was the last blow to the young sailor's hopes, for now the fact of the condition of the brig would no longer be a secret, and others, beside him, might think it a remarkably good opportunity to claim salvage, or, at least, a rich reward, for extricating her from what was really a dangerous position.

When the natives should learn that the *Progressive Age* was in such a defenceless condition, it would not be long before a sufficient number, piratically inclined, would spirit her away.

"It's foolish to think about it any more," he said, as he busied himself with some trifling duty on deck. "It's such a chance as a fellow doesn't often have; but I've lost it, so there's no use crying over what can't be helped."

Before two hours elapsed Ben had succeeded in getting himself into a reasonably comfortable frame of mind by resolutely putting far from him all "might have beens," and trying to look forward to the future hopefully, for some opportunity of winning his way from the position of seaman to that of master of a ship.

Then the captain came on board, and, ten minutes later, Ben was summoned to the cabin.

He found his father looking over a chart of the coast, and, thanks to his long study of a similar document, he recognised the outlines of Nampang Island.

"Did you come directly aboard after you left me?" the captain asked.

"Yes, sir."

“No further discussion with the consignees?”

“No, sir. After hearing what you had to say, it did not seem as if there was any good reason why I should figure on the chances of bringing the brig into port.”

“Well, boy, I have half a mind to let you try the scheme. The *Progressive Age* belongs to the same parties who own the *Sportsman*, and, as a matter of fact, it is, in a certain sense, my duty to protect their property under such circumstances as now exist. Suppose I was willing you should make the attempt, how would you set about it?”

“Go down to Nampang Island the best way I could, in a sampan, if nothing else offers, for, according to my idea, it is of the greatest importance to reach there at the earliest possible moment. Then I would engage such men as could be found on the island and around the coast, and work her up here.”

“You do not understand the Chinese language. How do you propose to handle a Chinese crew?”

“If I could n’t find some one to act as interpreter, I’d be willing to guarantee I could make them understand what I meant before we got under way. If she’s light, so much the more reason for running up under easy sail, and I reckon I could do a little more than an able seaman’s work myself, if the reward at the end of it was a possible captaincy.”

“And you expect to jump directly from the forecastle into the cabin, eh?”

“It has been done before, sir. There seems to me no

reason why a man should not, if he is competent to take command of a vessel."

"Do you think you are?"

"I am certain of it, sir."

"Well, my boy, I'm going to let you make the venture. The consul will give you authority to take charge of the brig; but remember this, if through your carelessness or ignorance, or even through stress of circumstances over which you have no control, anything should happen to the craft, your chances of ever being master would be very much smaller than they are at present. A mistake now will be serious, so far as your reputation is concerned, for no matter what might occur in the way of disaster, it would be set down to your inexperience, even though you should handle her more carefully and skilfully than an older captain."

"I understand that, sir, and probably should take more precautions than an older man."

"I have no doubt of it. If you are willing to take the risk, go ahead. How much money do you need?"

"I reckon I can get along with the wages that are due me, sir. I had rather not borrow."

"But it is necessary you should go very quickly."

"Yes, sir, and I shall have sufficient funds for that purpose if I take up my wages."

The captain gave Ben an order on the consignees of the ship, saying as he did so :

"I suppose you would prefer Chinese money, since you are going down the coast? This is the full amount of your

wages to date, and if you spend it without accomplishing the purpose, you will be penniless while we lie in Hong Kong."

Ben thanked his father, ran to his sea-chest to make such change in his costume as he thought might be necessary, acquainted Mr. Short with the good news, and hurried ashore, saying as he clambered over the rail :

"I'll see you when I come back with the money, for I may want you to help me hire a boat."

After getting his father's order cashed, he wasted very little time at the consul's. A power of attorney had been made out, and was ready for him.

Without stopping to give any details as to his proposed journey, he hurried back to Pedder's Wharf.

Mr. Short, having learned from the captain under what auspices the young sailor would set out, was on shore waiting for his return, and said as Ben came on to the dock :

"I don't see, lad, that there's any show of your gettin' down to the island except in a sampan. It's hard on to an hundred an' fifty miles from here."

"Then the sooner I hire one the better, for I want to be on my way within an hour."

"Hadn't you better try to pick up some sailors from here to take down with you?"

"No, sir," Ben replied, emphatically. "If I accomplish this I want all the credit, and by taking Americans with me it would be claimed that they helped engineer the job. The only question is, how much I shall have to pay for a boat to carry me down there?"

"We 'll hunt around a bit. I don't see any here," Mr. Short replied, thoughtfully.

"It looks to me as if there were plenty."

"Why, you are not countin' on tryin' it in one of these small craft, are you ?"

"Of course ; what's to hinder ? I reckon they will keep above water till I get there, and the smaller she is the less money to pay."

"It strikes me you 're bound to make this scheme as dangerous as you know how, an' yet the orders are that you are not to be interfered with in any way."

Then Mr. Short began bargaining with one of the native boatmen ; Ben purchased a limited amount of provisions, and in less than two hours from the time his father had given permission, the would-be captain started on what was certainly a venturesome, if not decidedly perilous, voyage.

Of the journey in the sampan it is not necessary to speak at length, save concerning one apparently trifling episode, since, despite the opportunity for adventure, the voyage was as uneventful as can well be imagined.

The boatmen had been employed to take their passengers to Nampang Island, where all their responsibility would cease, and, in order to earn their money quickly, made no halt ; but urged the frail craft at her best speed inside the chain of islands along the coast.

Ben had no reason to fret because of delay, save in the one instance referred to, and that was so trifling that, eager though he was to arrive at his destination, he would have been ashamed to complain.

It was when they were rounding the point of Chang-Chuen Island that the owner of the boat was hailed by some one on the shore, and an instant later a sampan put out to intercept the travelers.

The islander did not come on board ; but, with his craft alongside the other, held an animated conversation with Ben's boatmen, and, by the glances cast toward him from time to time, the young captain understood he was the subject of the discussion, but in what manner it was impossible to say, since he had no knowledge of the language.

"It strikes me those fellows are jabbering away too excitedly to be strictly innocent of any wrong," Ben said to himself, making certain his revolver was where it could be reached at an instant's notice. "It looks as if this last Chinaman was trying to persuade the others to tackle me for what money might be got ; but it would n't be a paying job, I'll go bail on that."

If the newcomer was attempting to urge his acquaintances into anything of the kind, the effort was a failure, for, after conversing ten minutes or more, the three separated, apparently with professions of the most profound regard and esteem for each other, and the little craft was pushed forward toward her destination once more.

It never entered Ben's mind that their conversation might possibly have reference to the brig he was intending to take to Hong Kong, and half an hour later had almost forgotten the circumstance.

As a matter of course he was on the alert against possible mischief, as he had been from the moment of

leaving port ; but no suspicious actions were seen, and he began to think these boatmen of his were as honest as any of their competitors to be found in the vicinity of Pedder's Wharf, which was not giving them very great praise.

In a little more than half the time he had allowed for the voyage, the owner of the craft directed his attention to a square-rigged brig lying at anchor close to the island.

“ Poglesef Egg,” the Chinaman said, as he pointed to the vessel, and Ben could almost have hugged himself for joy, on noting the fact that the decks were deserted.

It was evident the natives had not discovered her defenceless condition, and he had arrived in time to put into execution the plan already formed in his mind.

He would have been pleased to hire his sampan men for a while longer, in order to recruit a sufficient crew to take the brig up the coast ; but their knowledge of English was quite as limited as his of Chinese, consequently it was impossible to make any proposition which could be understood.

Ben did not go through the formality of hailing the brig ; but clambered on board by the fore-shrouds, and instantly he had gained a footing on the vessel, the boatmen put off on their return, as if a delay of even a moment might work great injury in their business.

“ I should n’t be surprised if I ’d taken a bigger contract than I counted on,” Ben said to himself, as he surveyed the deck while standing on the rail. “ Those sailors were not satisfied with abandoning the craft, but it

looks very much as if they tried to do all the mischief possible before leaving."

There was good reason why the self-elected captain should feel dismayed by the task before him.

Hardly a rope was in place ; the decks were strewn with litter of all kinds, and it would be difficult to imagine a scene of greater confusion than that presented from Ben's point of view.

"Brig ahoy!" the young sailor shouted, as he leaped down from the rail, and an instant later a black, woolly head appeared from the door of the galley, the ebony face of which displayed signs of the liveliest fear.

"Whar — whar — whar you'se cum frum?" the owner of the head asked, in a trembling voice, acting as if undecided whether it would not be safer to barricade himself inside his kitchen, than run the risk of an encounter with a person who had apparently risen from the bottom of the sea.

"I'm just from Davy Jones's locker, and come to find out why you are living so long," Ben replied, with a laugh, as he resolutely banished the fears which had assailed him after one glance at the decks.

"G'way frum hyar! G'way frum hyar!" the cook shouted, and disappeared for an instant to procure a long carving-knife, which he waved to and fro frantically as the young man approached the galley.

"Put up that knife. Put it back where you got it from. I have n't come down here to do you any harm ; but only to take charge of the brig. We picked up some of your

men who deserted the other day, and found out you were in trouble."

The old man dropped his knife, clasped his hands, rolled his eyes heavenward until nothing but the white portions could be seen, and shouted fervently :

"Bress de Lawd ! Bress de Lawd !"

"Did n't any of the sailors stay with you ?" Ben asked, as the old darkey arose to his feet.

"Not one ob 'em, massa captain. Ebery blessed man ob 'em runned away when de brig was tied up to de anchor, an' nobody 's down hyar but Missy Belle an' old 'Liphlet."

"I suppose Missy Belle is the baby, eh ?"

"She am, an' de sweetes' chile dis yere ole nigger eber saw."

"Then she is a girl, of course ?" and even as he spoke Ben realised what a foolish question he had asked.

"For suah."

"Where is she now ?"

"In de cabin, sah. She 's gwine to be des erbout tickled to def fo' to see yo', sah."

"I didn't come down here to take care of children, so I don't suppose there is any need of hunting her up until we get into port, providing she is old enough to feed herself. All I ask is that she'll stay where she belongs, and won't come yelling around while I'm trying to work the brig with a lot of Chinamen, for if there's anything I do hate it is to hear a young one squall, and it seems as if that was about all they did, especially at sea. I tell you, uncle — "

Ben did not finish the sentence, and it is more than probable he wished very heartily he had kept his opinions regarding children to himself, for at that instant, as he half turned to look around while continuing his speech with the cook, he saw standing within a few feet of him as charming a specimen of young womanhood as it had ever been his good fortune to meet.

His hat was off his head in an instant, and, while doing his best to make a graceful bow, he said, stammeringly :

“I beg your pardon, miss ; but the cook here told me there was no one but himself and a child on board.”

“Uncle Eliphilet only speaks the truth,” the young lady replied. “I am the child.”

Ben’s confusion increased rather than diminished, and, despite all his efforts, he could summon no words to his lips more gallant than —

“The sailor spoke of you as a child, and I had an idea I was going to find a little bit of a thing — I mean, an infant.”

“The sailor,” the young lady repeated, in surprise. “Have you seen any of our crew ?”

Ben explained how he had learned of the condition of the vessel, and when he concluded the young lady asked doubtfully :

“Are you empowered, sir, to take command of this brig ?”

“I am,” Ben replied, promptly, recovering his presence of mind now that they were speaking of business, “and here is my authority,” he added, as he handed her the

power of attorney. "My father is employed by the same house that owns this craft, and since the consignees felt doubtful about taking any very decided steps in the matter, until ascertaining the wishes of the owners, it was agreed I might come down to bring her into port. My most earnest wish is that I may be allowed to carry her home."

"You look very young, sir, to be a captain."

"I never have been as yet ; but am capable of taking command of this craft."

The girl looked at him questioningly an instant, as if hardly crediting this bold assertion, and then asked :

"Where are the crew?"

"I have none as yet ; but am counting on picking up enough natives to handle the brig. We sha' n't need many men to run from here to Hong Kong, for I reckon on taking the place of two or three myself !"

It was evident this statement was not as satisfactory to the "child" as Ben had fancied it might be.

For an instant she appeared at a loss to know what to say, and then, as the pause became almost painful, replied, with a faint smile which Ben thought very bewitching :

"Will you come into the cabin, sir ? I can't offer you much in the way of refreshments, for the crew have helped themselves, and wasted the stores until there is very little left."

"I hope you have not been suffering for anything to eat," and then Ben asked himself whether as dainty a looking specimen of humanity really did eat ordinary food.

"Oh, dear, no. Uncle Eliphilet has always contrived to dish up something in the way of dainties, and I have been to sea too long to be fastidious about my food."

One glance at the cabin of the *Progressive Age* showed that it had been the home of a woman, for nowhere can the imprint of a woman's hand be seen so plainly as at sea, where one least expects to find evidences of refinement.

The main saloon on board the *Sportsman* was furnished much more elegantly than this small apartment, on either side of which were bunks for the officers and passengers, and yet in Ben's eyes the former was not nearly as inviting a place as was this.

A bird-cage, a work-basket, a bit of ribbon here and a piece of half-finished embroidery there, made such a change in the general appearance of the apartment as could not have been effected by man.

Ben had expected to enter the cabin of the *Progressive Age* as master, and take formal possession, instead of which he followed this young woman, not much more than half as tall as himself, with the air of one who was intruding, and very meekly seated himself in the chair toward which she motioned.

"Having heard the story from the men, you doubtless know of all the trouble I have had during this voyage," the young lady began, and Ben, fearing he should be the means of bringing her grief more clearly before her mind, hastened to say :

"I did hear, Miss — Miss — "

“Dunham, sir. My father was George Dunham, of Yarmouth.”

“It is not necessary I should ask you for any information which may be painful, since the log-book will tell me what I need to know.”

“There is no reason why you should not learn all you care to hear from me. The sorrow remains in my heart whether I speak of it or not.”

“Will you tell me where the *Progressive Age* was bound for?”

“Formosa.”

“I wonder why the crew abandoned her here, instead of making that port?”

“I think it was because the second mate no longer felt able to control the men. After the death of my father and the first officer, he gave himself up almost entirely to drinking, and allowed the crew free access to the spirits, until it was impossible to enforce obedience.”

“It must have been a terrible time for you,” Ben said, half to himself, and she replied, sadly :

“Indeed it was, sir. It seemed as if I must be under the influence of some terrible dream, and even to be abandoned here, with no one but the steward on board, was a great relief. I should give the men credit for treating me with all possible respect; but the respect of drunken men is oftentimes brutal.”

Ben wanted to say something expressive of sympathy, and yet never before had he found it so difficult to decide upon what words should be used.

“I hope your troubles are over now,” was all he could think of at the time, and then, conscious of the fact that he was appearing very ill at ease, not as should the commander of a vessel, he added, “I think my first duty is to inspect the brig, with a view of ascertaining her condition for a run up the coast, and also question the steward as to the supplies on board.” If you will excuse me, I will set about it at once.”

“Let me go with you,” she said, quickly. “It is such a blessed relief, after these days of terrible anxiety, to have some one with whom I can speak.”

Ben was on the point of saying something about the good fortune of a young captain in having such a charming mate to accompany him on a tour of inspection; but he checked himself as he realised that neither the length of their acquaintance nor the circumstances would warrant anything of the kind.

CHAPTER IV.

ANTICIPATING TROUBLE.

A CAREFUL survey of the vessel was not calculated to make the young captain more comfortable in mind.

She was short of everything in the way of supplies ; it was necessary very much should be done to the running gear ; the paint was in shocking condition, and when Eliphilet gave an account of the provisions on hand, Ben doubted whether there would be sufficient to feed even a Chinese crew for a week.

Had he been in port with plenty of money at his command, it would have seemed like quite a task to get the brig in proper sailing trim ; but here, where probably little, if anything, could be procured from the shore, it appeared a formidable undertaking.

Fortunately, so far as the pockets of the owners and the fate of the *Progressive Age* was concerned, he did not shrink from the task.

The first and most important duty to be performed was the hiring of a native crew, and now it was that he regretted not having insisted that the boatmen remain to take him ashore.

“I can’t understand why those Chinamen gave me the slip so soon after we got here. It looked as if they were

afraid to wait a single minute. I made a mistake in paying them before I came on board," Ben said to himself. "What I should have done was to have let them stay until I made certain they would n't be needed. However, it 's too late to think of that now ; I must go ashore, and try to scare up somebody who can talk pidgin-English, if nothing more."

This last thought was spoken aloud, and, hearing it, Miss Dunham said quickly :

"You surely will not land until after having had something to eat. The steward is preparing a lunch ; but you will not find it remarkable either in quality or quantity."

"I suppose I might as well eat something if he is getting it ready ; but really, there is no necessity of anything of the kind," Ben replied. "Those Chinamen shared their rice with me ; I had some provisions of my own, and do not feel at all hungry."

He was quite positive in his own mind that he had no right to spend his time with the young woman, owing to the many duties which it was necessary should be performed without delay ; but it seemed almost cruel to leave her within fifteen minutes after his arrival, more especially when she had told him how lonely the past few weeks had been, therefore he resolved to spend several hours in idleness rather than have her think him a boor.

It is probable that if Captain Dunham's daughter had been less charming, Ben would not have been quite so careful regarding her feelings ; but one pretty girl can influence a young man in a wonderful degree.

Eliphalet may not have had very much in the way of provisions at his disposal; but he certainly, or so it seemed to Ben at the time, prepared a dainty lunch.

Perhaps the company he was in had some effect, or it might have been the knowledge that for the first time in his life he was really in command of a vessel, although one without a crew. At all events, he decided that he had never sat down to a more satisfactory repast, and made no attempt to bring it to a speedy conclusion.

Before rising from the table he learned very much relative to Miss Dunham's life on board the *Progressive Age*.

He knew she was motherless; that she was a good sailor, owing to the fact of having made three voyages with her father, who had been an able commander, and, during the past two years at least, had hardly known a sorrow, until Captain Dunham, stricken with fever, died suddenly a few weeks prior to the desertion of the crew.

From that moment up to the present time Ben could readily fancy what her life must have been, although she touched but lightly on the subject while relating to him the incidents of the voyage.

When the lunch was concluded the young lady excused herself for a few moments to bring a box of cigars from her father's room, as she said :

“I suppose you smoke, captain? It is a failing which I believe all sailors have, and, fortunately, the crew has not interfered with anything aft of the pantry.”

Now, as a matter of fact, Ben had never smoked; but when she called him captain, and referred to the belief

that all seamen were in the habit of using tobacco, he felt in duty bound to help himself from the box, for, singular as it may seem, he wished to appear very much of a man, in her eyes at least.

She brought him a match, and he lighted the cigar in a clumsy sort of fashion, wondering how long it would be safe for him to smoke it.

Then she began to ask him concerning his plans for hiring a crew, and he explained at greater length than was absolutely necessary, why he must go on shore before nightfall.

Miss Dunham expressed regret at being left alone again, and Ben tried so hard to assure her he should be absent only a short while, that for the time he forgot what a rapid inroad was being made upon the strong tobacco.

When he finally realised this important fact his head was swimming in a most unaccountable fashion, and he wondered what excuse he could make to leave the cabin in order to get a breath of fresh air, and, at the same time, quietly drop the ill-tasting cigar overboard.

It was destined that Eliphilet should be the one to extricate the young captain from his disagreeable position.

"I'se gwineter arsk yo', missy, ef I kin talk wid de captin? I 'se wantin' fo' to see him pow'ful bad fur a little minute," the old man said, as he put his head in at the cabin door.

Never did Ben reply so promptly to a steward's call as on this occasion.

He leaped quickly to his feet, excused himself hurriedly

to Miss Dunham, lest by waiting a few moments longer his face would betray the rebellion in his stomach, and went on deck in the least possible space of time.

Once the door was closed behind him, his first act was to throw the cigar overboard, and then, seizing the main rigging to steady himself, faced the steward.

There could be no complaint that the black face was expressionless, for the liveliest concern was written on every feature, as the old darkey, prefacing his questions with an apology for daring to interrogate the commander of the brig, asked :

“ Am it de sure enuff trufe you’s tole de young missy, ‘bout gwine fur er crowd ob dem low-down yeller men ? ”

“ Why, yes, uncle, that’s the only way open for us now. You don’t fancy we can find white men around these islands, do you ? ”

The old man shook his head, mournfully ; but made no reply, and the young captain asked, impatiently.

“ What’s the matter ? Are you one of those stewards who interfere with the sailors, and think you can’t get along with the Chinese ? ”

“ No, sah. I’se allers ‘tendin’ out de bes’ I know how on all han’s ; but I’se done gone ‘fraid ob dese yere yeller men. While we’se bin hyar seben or nine ob dem yere little skimmin’-pan boats hab kept mighty cluss ‘roun’ de brig, an’ your uncle gwinter hab his ‘pinyon wha’ dey cum fur.”

“ There’s no question but that the natives here are none too good to seize the vessel if they thought it could

be done without much risk," Ben replied, carelessly; "but you and I are a match for a dozen of those fellows, uncle, so don't bother your black head about them any more. They won't dare to go wrong after we once get the crew aboard. With any kind of a wind, a run up the coast can't be more than a pleasure excursion."

The old man did not appear to be particularly well pleased with this reply, and it seemed as if he was forced to exercise considerable self-control in order to prevent himself from commenting upon the young captain's remark.

He stood a few moments as if in deepest study, and then said, hesitatingly :

"Dere's one bit ob news I'se boun' fur to tell yer, sah," and bending toward Ben he whispered in the most tragic manner imaginable, "Dis yere brig am hanted."

The young captain had heard too much of the superstition of sailors to be very deeply impressed with this supposedly startling news, and contented himself by replying:

"We'll drive the ghosts out of here in short order, uncle. I'm a regular voodoo on that sort of thing. I see the deserters left you a boat, and if you'll lay hold here with me, we'll drop it in the water."

"Whar you'se gwine, sah?" the old man asked, without making any attempt to comply with what was at the same time a command and a request.

"Ashore to get my crew, of course. We must be under way by to-morrow morning."

"Don't do it, sah! Don't do it!" and the steward laid

his hand on the young captain's arm imploringly. "I'se suah dere's gwine to be trubble 'roun' dis yere craf' 'fore mawnin', an' I spect it's er cumin' right soon ef you done leabe us now."

"Look here, uncle, don't give me any more of that ghost business till I have time to attend to it. It is—"

"It ain' de ghostes, captin, it ain't de ghostes; but dese yere yeller men. Dey's gwine fo' to make trubble mighty soon. I'se bin tryin' fur to 'pare myse'f to take keer ob de young missy eber sence dem dish-pans cum flyin' 'roun'. Now dey's gittin' ready to swoop down on dis yere brig. Look 'dar! An' dar!" the old darkey added, as he pointed to the shore where, for the first time, the young captain observed several sampans in which the crews were sitting as if waiting some signal before putting off.

There was no necessity now for the steward to urge Ben to take every precaution.

A descent of the natives upon the defenceless vessel was what the young captain had feared at the moment of hearing of the brig's condition, and, in fact, during the journey from Hong Kong, almost fancied he should find she had been captured by the piratically inclined Chinese from the island.

"Have any of those fellows boarded the brig since you have been lying here?" he asked, quickly.

"No, sah, but dey hab hung 'roun' mos'ly all de time wid dere narrer eyes open des as wide as could be, an' dey knows how many ob us are hyar."



““LOOK DAR! ””

"Did Miss Dunham notice anything of the kind?" Ben asked, after a pause, during which he had been trying to decide what course to pursue.

"No, sah, she ain' been on deck berry much, an' yer uncle kep' his mouf shet mighty tight."

"Are there any weapons on board?"

"I'se done gone 'pare 'em, sah," and the steward ran into the deck-house, emerging a few seconds later with three formidable-looking carving-knives, which had evidently been sharpened with great care.

"Those don't amount to anything," Ben said, contemptuously. "Have n't you any firearms?"

"De ole cap'n mus' had a 'volver, sah, an' dat's all we'se got on dis yere craf', 'cept de cannon in de fo'-peak what de crew was countin' on bringin' up fur to celebrater wid."

"I've got one revolver, and if there's another in the captain's room you and I will be armed. As for the cannon, we'll look at that later. Can you shoot at a mark, uncle?"

"I could do dat, sah, but I'se pow'ful 'fraid de ole man would n't make no great fis' at hittin' it," and the steward rubbed his nose in perplexity as if trying to decide what he really would be able to do if called upon to use such a weapon.

"Do you shut your eyes when you shoot?"

"Mos'ly, sah, mos'ly. Seems like de bullet done go better when I don' watch it."

"I reckon it does about as well," Ben replied, grimly.

“Now the difficulty is to get a revolver without letting Miss Dunham know what we are about.”

Eliphalet had no suggestion to offer as to how this might be done, and Ben, understanding now that there was little time for delay, started for the cabin.

The knowledge of impending danger had driven from him all feeling of nausea, and at the same time restored to him his self-possession, which had been so sadly lacking during his first interview with the “mate of the brig.”

“What is the matter?” Miss Dunham asked, as he entered the cabin.

This was a question for which Ben was not prepared. To use his own expression he “was taken all aback by it.”

“Nothing; that is to say, nothing of any account. You know stewards are always fussing about trifles,” he replied, hesitatingly, not thinking it advisable to tell her either of the alleged ghosts or the possibility of a visit from the natives. “I was looking around to see what we had to defend ourselves, rather, make ourselves obeyed. You know a Chinese crew must be kept in subjection, and we should be prepared for any emergency, although I assure you there is not the slightest danger. Are there any firearms in your father’s cabin?”

“Go in and look for yourself, sir. It will be necessary for you to occupy that room, since the charts and all of father’s instruments are there.”

Ben hurriedly did as she suggested. He realised the fact that he had not acquitted himself very creditably so far as preventing her from seeing that he was disturbed in

mind, and was eager to accomplish his purpose and leave the cabin before she could ask any more questions.

In this he was not successful, however.

He found in the captain's desk a serviceable "Colt," with plenty of ammunition, but looked in vain for more.

Evidently this was the extent of the ship's stores in the way of weapons (if one excepted the old cannon spoken of by the steward), and hastily placing these articles in his pockets, Ben turned to retrace his steps.

He was met at the door of the room by Miss Dunham, who, while not appearing absolutely frightened, wore an expression of anxiety which was very apparent to the young man.

"Eliphalet has told you something which causes you to think there may be danger," she said. "It would be unkind to leave me in ignorance, more especially since you know, from what has already occurred, that I may be depended upon to at least control my feelings during a time of peril. Now, captain, will you please tell me why you came so suddenly for father's revolver?"

The last question was spoken in an imploring tone. The young girl had laid her hand coaxingly on Ben's arm, and his susceptible heart was not proof against her pleading.

Hastily turning the matter in his mind, he concluded that it might be better to inform her of all the steward had told him, save, perhaps, with the exception of the alleged ghosts, and replied in such a frank tone that she could have no question as to the truth of the words.

"I don't fancy there is any danger at all, and yet I am making preparations in case there should be," Ben said. "The steward tells me he has noticed several sampans hanging around the brig since the sailors deserted, and now there are a number on the shore evidently ready to put out. It would not be surprising if the natives should make an attempt to capture the brig, knowing her defenceless condition ; but I assure you, Miss Dunham, there is no possibility of their succeeding. That, positively, is the only reason why I came for your father's weapons, and perhaps I have done wrong in telling you what may simply be an old darkey's foolish ideas."

"You have told me nothing I did not know before," the young girl replied, with no show of fear. "I also have noticed the native boats evidently bent on reconnoitering, and have fancied there might be such an attempt as you speak of, made. Do you think it will be possible for three of us to prevent the capture of the brig, if the enemy should come in large numbers, as would probably be the case ? "

"You say 'three.' Surely you don't suppose I shall allow you to take a hand in such work," Ben replied, with some surprise.

"It would be difficult to prevent it, sir, if an attack was made. You will find that I shall be quite as effective a member of the crew as old Eliphilet, and, perhaps, not disposed to show the white feather so quickly."

"I have no doubt of that," Ben replied ; "but at the same time you must understand I most emphatically for-

bid your leaving the cabin in case there should be any disturbance on deck."

"There will be ample opportunity for us to speak of that," the young girl replied, with a smile that went straight to Ben's heart, and caused him to fancy, just at the moment, that in her defence he would be a match for any twenty natives who might attempt to board the brig.

"Did the steward tell you there was a cannon in the fore-peak?" Miss Dunham asked.

"Yes; but he spoke of it as something which was worthless, and if that is the case it might be as dangerous to us as the enemy."

"It probably looks worthless because it has been uncared for; but father purchased it with the belief that it was a serviceable weapon, and the ammunition intended for it is now in the lazaret."

"I'll get it on deck, in that case," and Ben left the cabin hurriedly, for he was now convinced of the evil intent of the natives, since Miss Dunham herself had noted their espionage of the craft.

When he gained the deck once more, old Eliphilet was standing by the rail, watching intently the movements of those on the shore, and he asked:

"Anything new, uncle?"

"Deys er gittin' more ob dem dish-pans 'roun' de shore. I'se bin countin' four des behin' dat ar' pint."

"We'll look after the rascals with a glass, presently. Just now I want that cannon out. Show me where it is."

The old darkey led the way to the fore-peak where

Ben found a serviceable-looking six-pounder mounted on a light carriage.

It was not a convenient article for two people to handle; but in a comparatively short space of time the weapon was gotten on deck, and the young captain went toward the cabin once more for the purpose of procuring ammunition.

"I could do that much without assistance," Miss Dunham said, when he entered, as she pointed to a small keg of powder, and several bags of grape-shot which had been placed in the corner of the saloon near the companion-way.

"Did you bring those here?" Ben asked, in surprise.

"Certainly; I wanted to convince you I could be of some service, and, besides, I knew exactly where they had been left."

"But you went into the lazaret with a light?"

"Yes, sir. It was what you would have been obliged to do, and there could be no more danger for me than any one else."

"But there was," Ben replied, quite emphatically, "and I can't allow you to take such risks."

"And I can't afford to sit still while you are working. No one can say how much time we may have at our disposal, and, when every moment is precious, the third member of the crew should do her full share."

Ben looked at her admiringly a few seconds, and then said, half to himself, as he stooped to raise the keg of powder:

"I do n't wonder your father brought you to sea with him. A woman like you is worth a dozen of some men such as I know."

"Thank you, sir," the young girl replied, laughingly. "I hope before many days you will have even a better impression of me."

"That would not be possible," Ben said, gallantly, and then he went on deck to make ready what might be an instrument of destruction, as well for those who handled it, as the enemy toward whom it should be directed.

CHAPTER V.

DISAGREEABLE VISITORS.

"IT looks as if my plans were being nipped in the bud before I've even had time to make a beginning," Ben muttered to himself, as he charged the six-pounder with as much powder as he fancied was consistent with safety, and added a generous supply of grape-shot. "Instead of getting a crew from the shore, I am forced to make ready for defence against the same fellows whom I thought could be hired, and the question is, how, after this scrimmage is over, if one comes, I am to pick up men enough to handle the brig. However, as the lobster said to the cook when she popped him into the hot water, we won't let that trouble us just yet. If I can train this gun right, we'll play hob with some of their sampans, and make the yellow rascals sick of trying to steal a vessel."

Eliphalet had watched the loading of the cannon intently, and, when the task was finally accomplished, asked :

"Is yer gwine fur to shoot right at 'em ef dey comes 'roun', sah?"

"I allow that's what we'll do, uncle, I count on lessening the inhabitants of that island by a good round dozen, if they try any funny business with us."

"Ef dem yeller scoun'rels surroun' us fore an' aft, wha's we gwine fur to be when de gun am shot off?"

"We'll get some service out of the old piece, and trust to luck for disabling as many of the craft as possible. After that, uncle, it's a question of our handling revolvers mighty lively."

It was evident the steward had very little faith in the six-pounder, and, from his uneasy movements when the young captain suggested his being called upon to use a revolver, he possibly doubted his own ability to make much of a defence.

The cannon had been placed on the quarter-deck, and it was there Ben proposed to marshal his little force.

Any attempt to prevent the brig being boarded, in case the natives should make a simultaneous attack from every side, would be useless with the small number of defenders, therefore the young captain had decided that if a struggle should ensue he must be prepared to meet it on the quarter-deck.

The companionway would serve as a convenient place for Miss Dunham to remain, if she insisted on taking part in the battle, for there Ben could force her to be partially sheltered, and on the stairs was laid the ammunition, where it would be most readily gotten at.

As a matter of course, Ben had no desire for a pitched battle, and even while making these preparations for defence, he was trying to decide how it might be avoided.

To land now in search of sailors would be the height

of imprudence, and yet, in case the natives were meditating an attack, the only certain means of preventing it was by immediate departure.

If he had had one other white man with him, Ben would then and there have attempted to take the brig into port without a crew, hazardous as such a course might be; but Eliphilet's age and general appearance suggested that he would not prove a very able or trustworthy seaman.

"If those fellows don't make a break between now and to-morrow morning, I stand some chance of hailing a sampan that I can send on shore in search of men," Ben said to himself; but with this came the idea that, by so doing, he might only be allowing the evil-disposed inhabitants of the island a better opportunity to take possession of the brig.

In the meantime, the number of boats on the shore was increased as if by magic.

That they came from opposite points of the island the watchers knew very well, yet it was seldom they were able to detect the arrivals until the craft itself was partially hauled up on the bank.

It was some time before Ben could understand the meaning of this strange state of affairs, and then he saw one of the sampans being brought out from among the foliage by two men.

"The rascals paddle up to that wooded point, then land to bring their boats across so we sha' n't get a glimpse of them," he said, believing he was alone; but, when the

words had been spoken, a clear voice, without the slightest evidence of tremor in it, said:

“They seem to be gathering in considerable force, captain, and I fancy it won’t be a great while now before you will have good proof of what their intentions are.”

Turning quickly, Ben saw Miss Dunham, who, with her own marine glass at her eyes, was scrutinising the shore of the island, and must have been in that position several moments while he was unaware of her presence.

There was now no reason why he should attempt to disguise the true position of affairs, for she could see quite as much as he; therefore he replied, gazing seaward:

“If there was a breath of air stirring, I’d up anchor and let the old hooker work off the shore, for our chances of getting a crew at sea appear to be better than finding one on this piece of land.”

“Judging from the general appearance of things on shore now, I should say that we would soon receive a visit from those fellows.”

“Yes,” Ben replied with a sigh, which escaped his lips involuntarily. “They’ll take precious good care to come before there’s an opportunity for us to leave our anchorage.” Then, bringing his hand down on the breech of the gun with a resounding slap, “Now I know the meaning of that visit to my boatmen!” and he told the young lady of the one incident which occurred during the voyage from Hong Kong.

“Then you think the men who came off from the island

knew that the attack was to be made on the brig?" Miss Dunham asked.

"I am positive of it. The scoundrels, seeing a white man, probably fancied the Hong Kong craft was heading for the *Progressive Age*, and came out to learn if such was the case. The chances are considerably more than even that the very men who brought me here are on shore, waiting to assist in the attack."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by Uncle Eliphilet, who had been forward attending to some work in his own department, and now came aft in a most pitiable condition of fear. His black face was of an ashen gray hue, and his eyeballs rolled to and fro in their sockets, as if he no longer had any control over them.

"What's up? What's up now?" Ben cried cheerily, understanding that Miss Dunham must hear that which the old darkey had to relate, since she had seen the exhibition of terror.

"Bress de Lawd, cap'n! Bress de Lawd, chile! De ghostes hab cum wuss 'n eber."

One quick glance at Miss Dunham showed that the steward's appearance, if not his words, had caused her alarm, and Ben understood that it was necessary to check, if possible, the old darkey's propensity for seeing supernatural beings.

"Now hold your tongue, and get forward! This is no time to be talking about ghosts, even if such things ever existed! Look ashore, and you 'll see what may cause us more trouble than a whole cargo of spirits ever could."

"But, sah, dey's in de fo'peak! I's done gone heerd 'em, sah! De debbil mus' be on dis yere craf'!"

"It won't take me long to persuade you that he is, and has gotten hold of you," Ben said, angrily. "If you can't do anything better than to run around getting frightened, go into the galley and stay there."

"But I done heerd 'em talkin', sah, an' dem ghostes soun's des like dese yere yaller fellers."

"Now see here, uncle, will you get away and hold your tongue about such things, or shall I have to fire you bodily forward where you belong?"

Ben displayed so much anger the old man evidently thought that, between the enraged captain and the ghosts, the latter would be likely to do him the least injury, therefore he obeyed; but in a very unwilling manner, shaking his head gravely as he muttered something about the way in which the alleged ghosts could be heard talking.

"I hope you're not frightened by what that foolish old darkey has told," Ben said, as he turned and faced the young girl. "Of course both you and I know how ridiculous such yarns are, and yet there is no place where one can hear as many as on shipboard."

"It is not that I am at all afraid of old Eliphilet's ghosts," Miss Dunham replied, readily; "but I am beginning to think he really did hear them."

"Do you believe in such things?" Ben asked, in surprise.

"I believe it is possible that he really heard people talking in the forepeak, and think the matter should be in-

vestigated at once. You must remember, captain, that we have been lying here several days with no watch kept at night. What an easy matter it would have been for some of these Chinese to come aboard after dark, and secrete themselves, ready to join their friends when the attack is made."

"What a thick-headed idiot I've been, to be sure, not to think of such a thing!" Ben exclaimed. "Any one but a blockhead like me would have searched every portion of the brig before settling down to watch for enemies from the shore. Will you stay here on guard, giving an alarm at the slightest suspicious movement you see, while I go below?"

"You don't intend to venture there alone, captain?" and the young girl laid one slender hand on Ben's arm to prevent him from leaving her so quickly.

"There is n't the slightest danger, no matter how many may be there, for at the sight of a revolver every yellow rascal will go down on his knees. The only fear they may do a person an injury is when they can slip up in the night and put a knife in his back."

"Yet you believe they are brave enough to attack this ship in the daytime," Miss Dunham said, as she pointed significantly toward the shore.

"They are made bold by the knowledge that there are only three on board, while they can probably muster fifty or a hundred. It is in the highest degree important that we know whether there is any one below or not, therefore we must not waste time. Keep your weather-eye lifting

on those sampans, and discharge one chamber of the revolver in case you want to summon me to the deck quickly."

Then, before she could make any further protest, Ben, with a weapon in his hand, went hurriedly forward, stopping at the galley only long enough to call Uncle Eliphilet, as he said :

"Light a lantern, and come into the forepeak with me."

"Bress de Lawd, cap'n, sah, is you gwine fur ter snoop down on dem yere ghostes? Don' do it, sah, don' do it!"

"Hold your tongue, and do as I tell you!" Then, noting the fact that the old fellow was in such a condition of abject terror as to render him almost useless as an assistant, Ben added in a more friendly tone, "There are no ghosts here, uncle ; but Miss Dunham and I have an idea some of those yellow scoundrels may have come on board, and are in hiding, ready to slip out on us when their friends give the signal. Now look alive with that lantern, for we may not have many minutes left in which to clear the rats out of this craft."

Uncle Eliphilet was more willing to face any number of live Chinamen, although he was by no means what would be called a brave darkey, than to venture where the slightest suspicion of a ghost might be entertained, and at once began to display considerable alacrity in obeying the captain's command.

After he had lighted the lantern, Eliphilet seized two of the well-sharpened knives, although how he could have

expected to use both in case any weapon should be necessary, while he was forced to carry the lamp in one hand, it is difficult to say, and then stepped out of the galley as a signal that he was ready to accompany the young captain on what might prove to be a decidedly perilous errand.

Ben gave one quick glance toward the shore to satisfy himself there had been no change in the general arrangement of the sampans, and then, warning Eliphilet that he must remain close in the rear in order that the tiny flame should be given the best possible opportunity for dispelling the darkness, he descended through the fore hatchway.

At this point the old darkey's courage failed him entirely, and, instead of following agreeably to the instructions given, he leaned over the combing, and lowered the lantern into the well-like apartment ; but without trusting his precious body below the deck.

Not a sound could be heard.

The silence was as that of the grave, and the darkness so intense that the tiny yellow flame only served to render it almost palpable.

“Come out here and show yourselves, or you ’ll stand a good chance of getting a few bullets in your heads !” Ben cried, standing with his back against a stanchion in order to protect himself from an attack in the rear, and trying in vain to pierce the gloom with his eyes.

There was no response, and but for the fact that Miss Dunham had been so impressed with the idea that one or

more natives were secreted on board, Ben would have said the forepeak was tenantless.

“Stand steady there, Eliphilet, and hold the lantern as low as you can. I’m going to shoot at random once or twice, and see what I can bring out.”

As he spoke, Ben discharged two chambers of his revolver in rapid succession.

Before the sound of the reports had fairly died away there was a scream of terror, a scrambling of footsteps, and three half-naked, villainous-looking Chinamen were facing him, brandishing their knives fiercely, and dancing to and fro to prevent him from taking accurate aim.

“Stand by with that lantern!” Ben shouted, and, at the same instant darting forward quickly, dealt one of the intruders a left-handed blow, which brought him to the deck half stunned.

Terrified though old Eliphilet was, he managed to hold the lantern in such a manner that the young captain could keep his adversaries in view, and at the muzzle of the revolver he forced them to stand by the side of their prostrate companion.

“Now throw down those knives!” he shouted.

It is doubtful if the men fully understood the words; but the gesture which he made was sufficiently expressive, and in an instant the weapons dropped to the deck, Ben crying to the steward :

“Lower the lantern, and get into the carpenter’s room for some pieces of ratline stuff! Don’t let the grass grow under your feet! We’ve got no time to waste here!”

Old Eliphilet obeyed, so far as dropping the lantern was concerned ; but, before he could procure the necessary material for binding the prisoners, Miss Dunham was bending over the hatchway.

“ How many ghosts did you find ? ” she asked, trying in vain to peer into the gloom.

“ Three, and I ’ll send the lot on deck as soon as I can trice them up a bit.”

“ Why not pass them up to me ? You can fetter them better where it is light, and I ’ll answer for it they don ’t escape me while you are clambering out.”

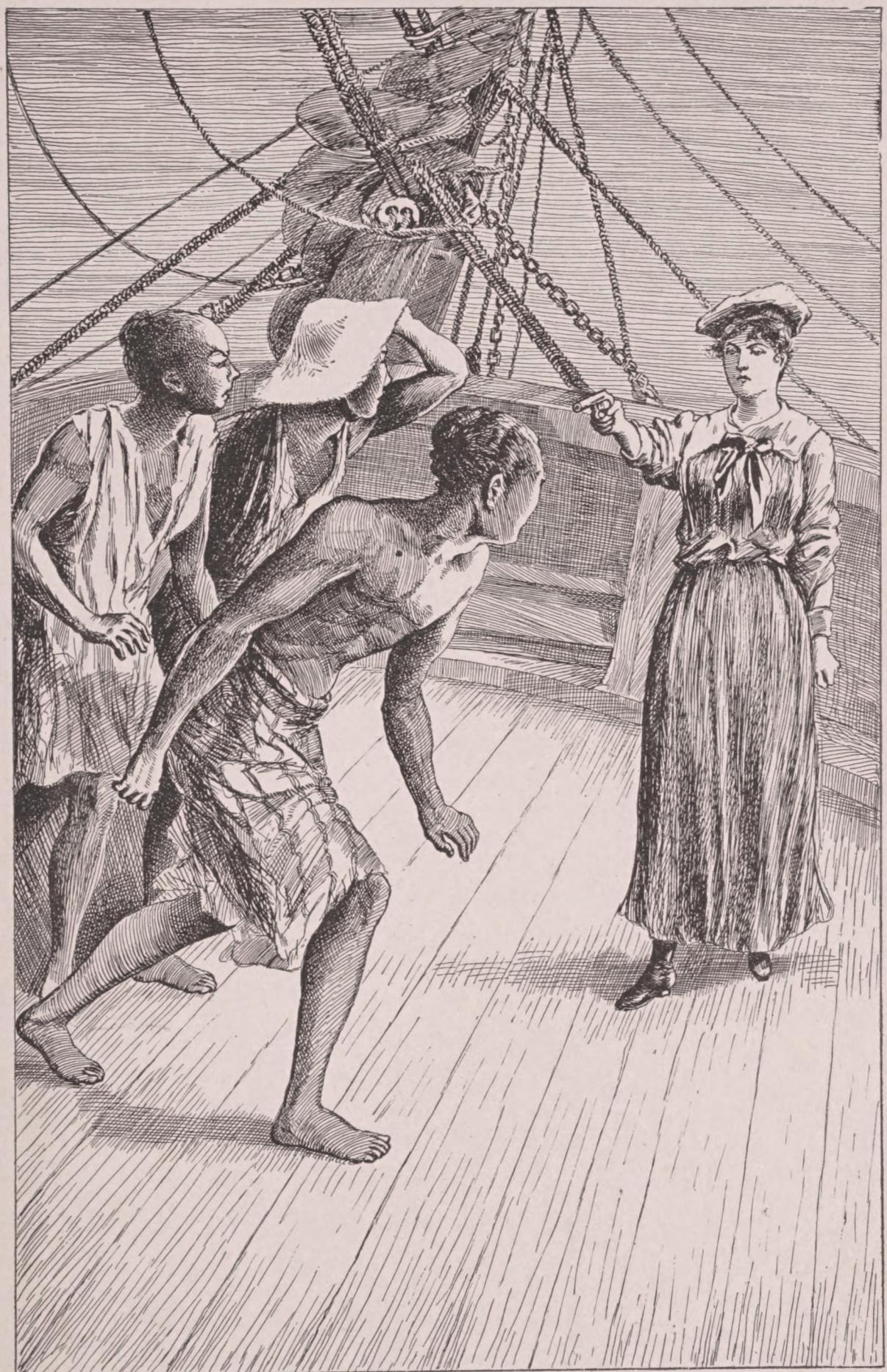
Ben hesitated an instant, as if fearing to expose her to possible danger, and then, realising that he would be at a decided disadvantage in case they should make an attempt at overpowering him while in that dark place, cried cheerily :

“ Keep your eye on them sharp, and don ’t hesitate to shoot if they make a motion toward going over the rail.”

Then, using his weapon as a means of emphasizing, and at the same time explaining his command, he ordered them to ascend the rude ladder.

Probably thinking they were to be allowed to escape, the men hurriedly obeyed, only to be confronted by a small, but decidedly resolute looking girl, who appeared able to do as much execution with her revolver as the captain could do with his.

By the time the three were on the deck and Ben had followed them, Eliphilet had returned with the ratline



"A SMALL, BUT DECIDEDLY RESOLUTE LOOKING GIRL."

stuff, and the work of making them close prisoners was speedily finished.

Triced up with their backs to the main rigging on the port side, they would afford the little crew no slight protection in case there was any attempt made to board the craft, and this Ben counted on when he placed them in that position.

"I only wish we had a few more of them," he said, grimly, when the last man was secured beyond all possibility of freeing himself from his bonds, unaided; "for I reckon those fellows on shore would n't care about cutting their way through members of their own gang, and we should stand a chance of making them come to terms without much fighting. Uncle, you'd better search those rascals, and see if they have got any more weapons. Then, as soon as you can get it ready, we'll have something to eat, for I reckon there won't be much chance to do cooking later in the afternoon."

Knowing that the prisoners could work him no harm, Uncle Eliphilet proceeded to make a minute examination of their clothing without delay; but his labour was in vain, so far as finding any weapons was concerned.

The knives which had been taken from them in the forepeak were all they had, and it was more than likely they were not able to bring others, owing to the fact of their having probably swam from the shore to the brig.

While the old darkey was making ready the food which Ben had ordered to be served on the quarter-deck, Miss Dunham was busily engaged arranging the ammunition

and spare weapons, such as two cutlasses, and one of the steward's knives, on the companionway steps where they could be reached with the least difficulty, and the young captain paced to and fro as if trying to decide some weighty question.

Not a breath of air had been stirring during the day; but now, as the night approached, a light breeze, coming from the direction of the island, rippled the glassy waters, and again did Ben think it might not only be possible, but advisable, to leave the dangerous anchorage.

“Can you steer?” he asked suddenly, turning toward the young girl, who was leaning over the edge of the companionway, scanning the island through the glass.

“Oh, yes, indeed! I don’t know that I should be very successful at it in heavy weather; but, under ordinary circumstances, I can handle the wheel.”

“Then I’ll try it,” he said, half to himself.

“Try what?” Miss Dunham asked, curiously.

“The scheme of getting under way before those fellows can come down on us in such numbers that we shall be literally overwhelmed.”

“But I don’t think you should count on any assistance from the steward. He is so old and timid that I question if you would be able to get him aloft.”

“I sha’n’t attempt it. We have three able-bodied men here, and it seems a clear waste of raw material not to make them earn their grub.”

“Are you thinking of trying to persuade those Chinamen to help you?”

"No, I shall *force* them to do as I say, and I reckon, with the muzzle of a revolver at their heads, they'll pull and haul as much as will be needed, unless the weather should change suddenly. The only possible trouble is that I may not be able to make them understand."

Miss Dunham shook her head doubtfully, as if thinking this new scheme of the young captain's was not only impracticable, but dangerous.

Fortunately, Ben did not see the gesture, which was so expressive, otherwise he might have been tempted to reconsider his determination, for he was beginning to place considerable confidence in the young woman's opinion.

The scheme seemed so feasible to him, and the necessity of getting away from that locality at the earliest possible opportunity so great, that he paid no attention just at that moment to anything around him, save as it was connected with the plan he had in mind.

In furtherance of it, while Miss Dunham stood looking around her as if having become convinced the consignees of the brig had made a mistake in sending so young a captain, Ben approached the prisoners.

He began to carry his scheme into execution by stating rapidly, and apparently regardless of whether they understood him or not, exactly what he proposed to do, promising in the most expressive tone, with the flourish of the revolver by way of emphasis, that he should not hesitate to shoot one or the three at the first attempt to escape, or a refusal to obey orders.

"If you do not understand all my words," he said, in conclusion, "I am satisfied you have a pretty good general idea of what I mean; therefore I shall not hesitate to do exactly as I have said."

The prisoners looked at him impassively, as if wholly at a loss to know what he had been talking about, and yet, from a certain twinkle in the eyes of one, he felt quite confident this particular fellow could, if he were so disposed, speak English as well as the majority of his countrymen in that vicinity.

Therefore he walked aft, leaving them alone to discuss the matter among themselves, as he said, with a cautionary flourish of the weapon:

"You'd better make up your minds to understand me, or else there'll be a considerable amount of shooting going on here, which won't be at all pleasant."

That they did know, or at least one of them did, what he had said, seemed evident from the fact that, as soon as he was near the companionway once more, the three began talking earnestly among themselves, and Ben said to the young girl, who had been watching him curiously:

"I fancy we shall make a go out of this thing. At all events it is a scheme worth trying, for the chances are decidedly against us if we stay here until those fellows ashore can muster in sufficient force to take the brig by sheer press of numbers."

Miss Dunham made no reply to this remark, and Ben understood from her silence that she was not at all in

favour of such an attempt; but unable to see any other way of escape from what seemed to be a very serious affair, he determined to carry out the plan, so far as should be possible, trusting to the chapter of accident and chance to bring the matter through successfully.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNWILLING CREW.

THE time which Ben thus occupied in maturing his plans had been utilised by the steward in preparing the afternoon meal, and he now began to bring it aft, placing it, according to the young girl's directions, on the top of the house, without any pretensions to elegance in the manner of serving it.

Cold boiled beef, ship's biscuit, hot tea, and pickles made up the entire bill of fare; not a very much better meal than would have been served in the forecastle of the *Sportsman*, and Ben asked in surprise:

"Is it possible the stores are down as low as this, steward? Haven't you got any little delicacy for Miss Dunham?"

"She doesn't need any," the young girl said, quickly, "and could not have it if she did. The stock of flour is so low we cannot afford hot biscuit, except as a luxury, and, after having put up with such fare as this so many days, I guess it won't be a serious matter if I do not have anything different until we reach port."

"Which we shall do, please God, very soon, providing we can get away before those fellows on shore have completed their preparations," Ben replied; and then, as if

this was a sort of grace before meat, he made a vigourous onslaught upon the scanty store of food, after seeing that Miss Dunham was served.

It was destined that even this poor supper should not be concluded without interruption.

Before Ben had appeased his hunger an unusual number of men could be seen gathering in the vicinity of the sampans, and the young captain rightly conjectured the time had come for the inhabitants of the island to make their descent upon the brig.

“Keep your eye on those fellows ashore, and tell me everything they do!” Ben cried, as he ran hastily forward to where the prisoners were, unloosing the one whom he believed could speak English, and another, leaving the third still tied to the rigging. “Here, Eliphilet, get forward with me to the capstan!” he shouted to the old darkey, the blackness of whose face was rapidly changing to an ashen hue. “I reckon time is short with us now.”

With his revolver held ready for instant use, and displaying it ostentatiously to the prisoners, he motioned them forward, saying, at the same time:

“Get on to that capstan the best you know how, or you won’t be likely to see your brother scoundrels again in this world!”

There was every reason why the men should understand what he meant by his gestures, knowing as they did in what desperate straits the few defenders of the brig would soon be placed in case the attack was made, and they obeyed with apparent willingness, the pawls clicking

merrily in the ratchets as they ran the drum around, Ben assisting with a bar, while holding his weapon in one hand, as Eliphilet, in a feeble sort of way, attempted to draw the slack cable into shape.

In the still air the clinking of the metal must have been heard distinctly on shore, and Miss Dunham, from her point of vantage, shouted :

“They are coming out from among the foliage in greater numbers now, and it looks as if they were getting ready to put off.”

By this time the anchor was clear of the bottom, and after two or three fathoms more of the chain had been brought inboard, Ben ordered his unwilling crew into the fore-rigging, accelerating their movements decidedly by the flourish of his revolver, as he cried :

“Loose the foretopsail, and do it lively there! Let me catch you skulking for a single moment, or making any motion to those fellows on shore, and I’ll send something after you that won’t be pleasant. Get hold of the jib halliards, Eliphilet, and lay down on them the best you know how!”

The Chinamen clambered up the rigging with the same celerity of movement they had shown in going forward, and Ben laid hold of the halliards, swaying down on the ropes as he kept his eyes fixed on the prisoners, Eliphilet adding his feeble strength to the work.

It was not to be expected the two could hoist the heavy canvas into position, for the steward was not much better than a boy at such work; but sufficient of the sail was

raised to catch the light breeze which bellied it seaward in a manner that delighted Ben, and told him the little brig would soon be drawing as rapidly away from the land as he had hoped.

“We ’ll belay there, uncle, until our friends come down. Get over to the capstan once more ; I think I ’ll let the third Chinaman loose.”

“Three of the sampans have put off already !” Miss Dunham cried ; “there must be at least fifty men on the beach.”

“If they allow us ten minutes more I don’t care how many come,” Ben shouted cheerily, and ran amidships to unfasten the last prisoner, who was very careful to obey the mute command to go forward, which was given with the muzzle of the revolver.

It was necessarily slow work for those aloft, but they were moving as rapidly as could have been expected, even faster than the young captain had fancied would be the case, and while they were at their work the anchor was hove up half a dozen fathoms more, after which the three hoisted the jib to somewhere near the proper position.

By the time this last task was completed, those above had finished all they could do, and were ordered on deck again.

Then the five manned the mainsail halliards, and in a very few moments after the huge square of canvas had been loosened to the breeze the brig began moving through the water, slowly to be sure, but yet with sufficient speed to show the anxious ones it was only a ques-

tion of time before she would be at a safe distance from the inhospitable island.

“Now I reckon we can give our undivided attention to our yellow friends who propose to pay us a visit!” Ben said in a triumphant tone to the young girl, after ordering his prisoners to their stations at the main rigging, and threatening them with the direst vengeance if they should make any attempt at going over the rail.

“I did think you were unwise in trying to get the brig under sail with those three fellows,” Miss Dunham said, as Ben stood for one brief instant by her side; “but I must admit you were right. If we were still at anchor that crowd of villains would necessarily make short work of us after the first discharge of the cannon, and she pointed to the fleet of sampans which was being paddled onward at full speed.

There could be no mistake as to the intentions of the newcomers; there were at least fifty men, each armed with murderous-looking knives and hatchets, and not a few carrying muskets, all shouting at the full strength of their lungs to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals, as if they expected to accomplish quite as much by noise as by force of arms.

“Are you going to leave those prisoners at liberty?” Miss Dunham asked, as Ben stood looking at the howling enemy, and wondering whether it would not be best to open fire on them at once.

“I reckon we may as well. It won’t pay to trice them up again, for it is possible they may be needed to handle

the ship. If they get away it will be the worse for us ; but I count on their being too much afraid of our revolvers to attempt anything of the kind."

"Shall I take the wheel now ?"

"Yes, although she has hardly got steerage-way on. Simply hold her steady. I believe I 'll have one shot at those fellows while they are at long range. Where did Eliphilet go ?"

"I saw him dive into the galley as soon as the pirates began to yell," the young lady replied with a merry laugh, which did more toward nerving Ben for the inevitable struggle than words could have done, for it showed that she at least could so far conquer her fears as to appreciate anything which appealed to her as being comical.

The enemy were not more than three hundred yards away when Ben trained his ancient cannon carefully, and said to the young girl who was now standing at the helm :

"You had better go below a moment ; there 's no knowing what may happen when the thing is discharged."

"I belong here if I 'm to be the helmsman, and here I propose to stay, no matter what the captain may say."

"Well, I like your pluck, but I can't say very much for your prudence," Ben replied, grimly, and then the piece was discharged, the three prisoners watching quite as eagerly the effect of the shot as did their captors.

The first discharge was an unqualified success.

A shower of grape-shot went hurtling into the foremost of the frail sampans, sinking two instantly, and shattering three to such a degree that their crew were forced to seek

safety on other boats, thus retarding the advance of the pirates very materially.

“Hurrah for our side!” Ben shouted, gleefully. “If we can give them one more dose like that I reckon they won’t be so anxious to come alongside;” and he began reloading with the utmost rapidity, Miss Dunham leaving the helm long enough to bring him a supply of ammunition from the companionway as he finished swabbing out the cannon.

A scattering fire of musketry was opened upon the brig; but the flint-lock guns were not in proper working order, nor were the yellow fellows remarkable for their good marksmanship, consequently such of the bullets as did not strike the water in the immediate vicinity of where the weapons were discharged flew harmlessly among the rigging, as if aimed at the sun.

Now the din of the drums and cymbals had ceased; the shouts of fury with which the yellow pirates had tried to animate their courage were changed to shrieks of pain and terror; but that portion of the fleet which remained uninjured continued on with redoubled speed, understanding full well that once they gained the deck the brig would be theirs.

Ben was not an expert gunner, even though his first attempt was so successful, and fully twice as many minutes were occupied in charging the piece as would have been required by any one familiar with such work.

There were yet a sufficient number of pirates dashing onward to overwhelm the young captain and his “mate,”

however valiantly they might fight, and it seemed as if they were close aboard when Ben discharged the piece the second time.

On this occasion the aim was no less true than before.

The sampans were coming in a cluster, and the grape-shot, of which there was a plentiful supply, worked an almost incredible amount of execution ; but yet the victory was far from being won.

Half a dozen craft were sent to the bottom, as many more shattered into uselessness ; a score of men were struggling in the water, but yet at least ten sampans continued to advance, and before the cannon could be reloaded would have gained the shelter of the brig's bow.

His brief efforts and skilful plans would be of no avail, if once the men gained a foothold on the deck, and this Ben understood thoroughly.

“ Stay where you are, and shoot if a head shows above the rail ! ” he cried hurriedly to the young girl. “ See to it that the sails are kept drawing.”

Then he rushed forward, motioning the prisoners to go in advance of him, which they did without protest because of his weapon, and, as they passed the galley, he shouted for Eliphilet to follow.

The forward hatch was yet off, and he forced his captives below in the shortest space of time, fastening them securely in just as the occupants of the foremost sampan were clutching at the cable, intending to draw themselves up by this means.

Three well-directed shots from his revolver served to

check the men in this particular craft, and render them incapable of any further mischief ; but while this was being done two other boats had made fast alongside, and Ben turned to meet the new danger just as the pirates were appearing in several places at the same moment.

Twice had Miss Dunham fired, once with effect, and Ben was attacking a sampan-load of the enemy with a capstan-bar, not having had time to reload his weapon, when old Eliphilet emerged from the galley with a dishpan full of glowing coals.

The steward looked as thoroughly frightened as a man well can ; but, despite his terror, managed to do a marvellous amount of execution in a short time.

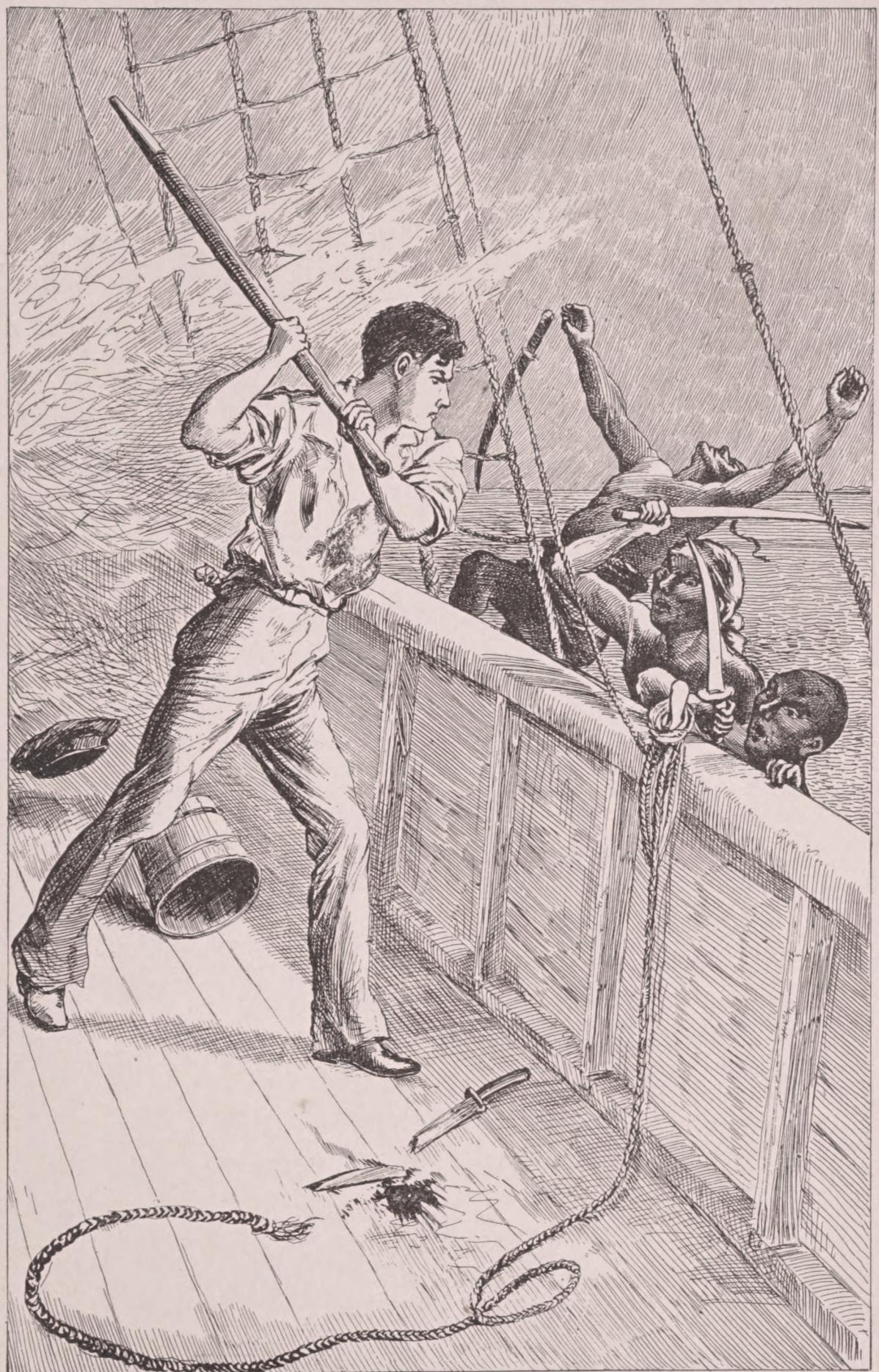
He emptied half a bushel of glowing anthracite directly into one of the boats, causing the occupants to leap overboard with cries of pain.

“Good for you, old man !” Ben shouted, striking down a Chinaman who had succeeded in gaining a hold on the forerigging. “Try that game once more, and you’ll be doing your full share of the work.”

“Bress de Lawd ! Bress de Lawd ! I ’se sendin’ ’em up de golden stairs,” Eliphilet cried in a singsong tone ; but it is extremely doubtful if he knew what he was saying, for, despite the fact that he assisted materially in the defence, he was yet so terrified as to be almost frantic.

The range in the galley had been emptied of its contents by this first discharge, and the old darkey seized anything of a heavy nature which came within reach.

As the sampans advanced he showered iron belaying-



"BEN WAS ATTACKING A SAMPAN-LOAD OF THE ENEMY."

pins, heavy pots and pans, spare blocks, and even his precious carving-knives upon the heads of the men, and more than one of the frail craft went to the bottom under this miscellaneous assortment of ammunition.

How long this engagement lasted Ben had no idea, and even Miss Dunham would be unable to state with any degree of accuracy.

The defenders of the brig were working so desperately and rapidly as to take no heed of the passage of time, but probably the hot fight did not last more than a quarter of an hour, yet in these few moments the wind had increased until the brig was showing quite a "bone in her teeth," as she slipped through the water more rapidly than the disheartened Chinamen could paddle their sampans.

The victory was complete, and when Ben, his face begrimed with powder and streaked with perspiration, came aft to fire a few parting shots at the last of the retreating enemy, Miss Dunham seized his hand regardless of her duties at the helm, as she said, earnestly :

"Forgive me for having thought even for a moment that you were too young and inexperienced to extricate us from the position in which we were left when the crew abandoned the brig. I was thoroughly opposed to your calling upon the prisoners for assistance, and yet if that hadn't been done we should now either be captives or dead."

"You don't want to say anything about my forgiving you," Ben replied, heartily, "for you could not be expected to have as much faith in me as you would in an older man,

and there was a good deal of risk, anyway, in what I did. If the wind hadn't sprung up, or the prisoners chanced to turn rusty and showed fight, in fact, if almost anything had happened to waste five minutes of time, the result might have been very different."

"But nothing did happen, and it was through your own unaided exertions that we can now say we are safe."

"Not unaided by any manner of means, Miss Dunham, when I had such a mate as you at the wheel. I want it distinctly understood that if you had been a different kind of a young woman, one of those, for instance, who think it necessary to faint or scream when anything out of the ordinary course happens, matters would not be in as cheerful a condition as they are now."

"I haven't done anything but stand at the wheel."

"If you hadn't been on board I should have been obliged to steer, so you counted as one man, and a great deal better you were than the majority of men; that I can say without reasonable chance of contradiction."

"If you are going to shower compliments so thickly, perhaps it will be just as well that we don't talk about the battle. Do you have any objections to telling me what you propose to do now?"

"Certainly not. It is my intention to get this brig into Hong Kong."

"Without any crew?"

"You forget that I have three men in the fore-peak."

“If you try to work the brig with no other assistance, it will be necessary for you to remain on deck night and day.”

“So it would in any event, no matter how many men I had taken from the shore. I wouldn’t have trusted them for a single moment. We must run a good many chances in a case like this, and no matter what happens in the way of weather, we cannot suffer more than to be blown out of our course, for with such canvas as is spread a gale might rage from now until next January, and not start a bolt-rope. Did you notice how Uncle Eliphilet flashed up in the last act?”

“Yes, but I don’t think he can be credited with displaying courage, for, in my opinion, he was like one in a dream ; his terror had so far gotten the best of him that he was really delirious.”

“Well, it’s mighty lucky for us his delirium took the form it did, for he cleaned out no less than four sampans, to my positive knowledge. I wonder where he is now?”

“Probably hiding in the galley, as much afraid of himself as of the enemy he helped to disperse.”

“Can you stay here at the wheel a while longer?”

“I shall be on deck exactly as many hours as you are forced to remain, and there’s no question but that I can steer while the wind is as light as it is now.”

“You will go below as soon as I get things into shape, if the captain has any authority on board this brig.”

“He doesn’t have much over his mate,” the young lady replied, laughingly. “I will admit that you are the

captain ; but I am the first officer, therefore it would be no use for you to order me below."

" Well, if there 's a craft afloat that 's got a trimmer, more beautiful or a more insubordinate officer than the *Progressive Age*, I 'd like to see her as a curiosity," Ben said, and there was a certain ring in his voice which caused the red blood to come into Miss Dunham's face like a flood.

" I see you can pay a compliment quite as well as you can fight, captain," she replied, half shyly, and then added quickly, " Don 't you think it would be a good idea to cat the anchor, instead of leaving it as it is ? "

" I declare I had forgotten all about that," and Ben hurried forward, stopping a moment to look into the gallery, hailing Eliphilet, who was crouching in one corner behind the stove, trembling as if in an ague fit.

" Well, what 's the matter with you, uncle ? It is n't ten minutes since you were as bold as a turkey, and now that the scrimmage is over you must n't give in like this."

" Am it ober, sah ? " the old man asked, as he cautiously drew out his head sufficiently to enable him to see the young captain.

" Is what over ? "

" De onpleasantness, sah. De fuss wid dem yeller scoun'rels ? "

" Of course it is, and you did your duty like a man, even if you didn 't know it. Now stir yourself, and begin to dish up the grub once more, for we are heading for Hong Kong."



““AM DE HEATHENS ALL GONE OUTER DIS YERE SHIP?’’”

“Am de heathens all gone outer dis yere ship?” and Eliphilet crawled from behind the stove, rising slowly to his feet as he asked the question.

“We’ve got three stowed away for further use, and I reckon you’ll have to fill them up with something eatable, for I am counting on carrying them into port.”

“Is I to cook fur sich cattle?”

“You are, my venerable darkey, and you will be mighty lucky if you don’t have to do so for more than three, before we reach the United States.”

The old man looked as if he had received a severe blow, and then, realising that it would not do to make any opposition to the captain’s orders, began hunting in a dazed sort of way for the knives he had thrown overboard.

Ben’s crew came out of the forepeak very willingly, after being given an opportunity, and when he told them what he wished done there was no question but that his words were understood, even though he employed no gestures.

The terrible punishment which they had seen inflicted upon their countrymen caused them to stand in awe of this young captain, and Ben felt quite positive he could count on their being submissive until the term of enforced service should come to an end.

When the anchor had been catted he ordered them to the galley, as he said :

“I don’t know how long you’ve been hiding on this craft ; but reckon by this time you’re in reasonably good shape for grub. I’ll have the steward fill you up, and I

want you to remember this : During the remainder of the time you are aboard the brig you shall be treated well so long as you do your duty, and when we get to Hong Kong I will pay you the same wages as I would honest men ; but turn rusty ever so little, and I sha' n't hesitate to send you over the rail without a moment's warning."

Neither of the men replied, and Ben was gratified by seeing that they looked thoroughly cowed, for he took it as proof that he would have no further trouble with them.

By the time he returned to the galley Uncle Eliphilet had so far recovered from his terror as to be able to understand the general condition of affairs, and the order was given to supply the prisoners with plenty of beef, biscuit and tea.

The old darkey looked reproachfully at the young captain, and then angrily at the crew, as he said :

" I 'se 'bleeged ter chop out de beef wid a axe, kase dose yere yeller scoun'rels hab done gone stole de knives."

" Why, I saw you throw them at those fellows in the sampans, uncle," Ben cried, laughingly.

" Did I, sah ? Did I go fur to do eny sich fool bizness ? "

" You did for a fact, and there was n't very much foolishness about it at the time. It don't make any difference how you get the beef into pieces so long as the men are fed ; so look alive, for we 'll soon be wanting something to eat aft," and then Ben rejoined his " mate " at the wheel.

CHAPTER VII.

IN COMMAND.

NOW it was that Ben had time to look about him, and consider the situation.

The indications were that the weather would hold fine, and the breeze, which was carrying the brig along at the rate of two or three knots an hour, could be depended upon until morning, therefore, so far as the safety of the vessel was concerned, the young captain had no cause for fear.

Had there been a full crew on the *Progressive Age*, every inch of the canvas would have been spread to the breeze, and the short run to Hong Kong might have been made in twenty-four hours; but instead of a dozen men, the young captain himself was the only one who could be relied upon implicitly. Old Eliphilet, save for his work in the galley, was of no value whatever, and whether the prisoners could be forced to do seamen's duty yet remained to be seen.

Probably an older man, who understood thoroughly all the difficulties which might be encountered, would have been disheartened; but Ben, flushed with the success of having got the brig under way in time to escape from the pirates, and eager to win the first step toward a captain's

commission, took no heed, save in a general way, of the future. It was sufficient for him that he had succeeded thus far in his attempt, and, sanguine now of accomplishing his purpose, he was in the best of spirits.

"I reckon we can count on making Hong Kong whenever we feel so disposed," Ben said, cheerily, as he approached the wheel. "We'll call it your watch below, now, and I'll take my trick at the helm."

"But is n't there anything to be done?" Miss Dunham asked.

"Indeed there is. I could find a week's employment for a dozen men and then not have the old hooker in decent shape; but it's foolish to talk about that when we've only three yellow pirates and a frightened negro aboard, so we'll let things go as they are until we get into port. You are to take a little rest, now, for I fancy you need it."

"Not so much as I am sure you must, for I had a long time of idleness while you were coming down in the sampan. It is my intention to stay where I am, unless the wind calls for stronger arms at the wheel."

"But I can't think of allowing you to stand here, more especially when I have n't anything important to do," Ben said, with a feeble attempt at sternness.

"I have n't asked your permission. You can't very well order the mate below, and here I propose to remain. Besides, it seems to me you should be free to go where you please, because those Chinamen need careful watching. No one can say how soon they may attempt to take

possession of the brig, and it would n't be strange if they did contemplate something of the kind, since there is really only one man to oppose them."

"But I can keep my eye on them and steer at the same time."

"And so can I," Miss Dunham replied quickly; "or, at least, I can do the steering, and if you are at liberty it will be possible to get the decks into something like decent condition before we reach port."

As a matter of fact Ben preferred to have the young lady near him, and, since she was so determined to assist in working the brig, he made no further attempt to send her below.

As she had said, there was very much to be done, and when the Chinamen had finished their meal, the young captain called them aft to send the cannon below, taking good care, at the same time, to let them see that both he and the young lady were on the alert for possible mischief.

Then a feeble attempt was made to clear the decks, at least so far as to render it possible for the men to do the necessary work of handling the ship, and by sunset matters wore a decidedly different appearance from what they had when the young captain came on board.

These seamanlike operations had restored to old Eliph-alet his lost courage, and he bustled around in the galley in the busiest fashion, singing "Ebery day'll be Sunday byneby," in the jolliest manner possible.

Ben spelled Miss Dunham at the wheel while she ate

supper, and the Chinamen lounged around on the deck, apparently well content with the situation, as they certainly must have been if they contrasted it with that of their comrades who had participated in the attack.

Had Ben been able to arrange matters as he thought they should be, his "mate" would have retired to her room, for he felt certain she must be in need of rest; but when he attempted once more to induce her to go below, his proposition was met by such a decided refusal that he was forced to desist, although he insisted on handling the wheel himself during the hours of the evening.

She brought her lounging chair from the cabin, and, sitting by his side, opened a conversation by referring to the compass, much as if wishing to banish from her mind all memory of the immediate past.

"What would sailors do without a true friend like that," she said, pointing to the binnacle.

"I reckon they'd have to stay at home, for I can't fancy how a mariner could get along without his compass; but I don't give it any great credit for being true. The deviations of the needle have brought many a good ship to the reefs."

"That would not happen if it was often corrected."

"Merchant sailors don't have time to 'swing' a ship as do those in the navy."

"No, and yet they might do so oftener. I wonder when compasses were invented?"

"That has interested me a good bit," Ben replied.

"According to all I've been able to pick up on the subject they were unknown in Europe until the end of the twelfth century; but had been used in China and the East, generally, before the Christian era. It is said that the Emperor Hon-aug-ti made an instrument, three or four thousand years ago, which would indicate the south."

"I read somewhere that a knowledge of the compass was brought to Europe by Marco Polo on his return from Cathay," Miss Dunham interrupted.

"Yes, I remember that account; but I have seen it stated that instruments were known to have been used at sea about the year 300. I wonder if the mariners in those days were troubled by the variations of the needle as much as we are now."

"I should say not, for there was probably less iron around. Have you seen the compass invented by Sir William Thomson? By the way, is he a relative of yours?"

"I have seen his invention, which is a valuable one, and am sorry to say that I can't claim kinship. He spells his name without a 'p,' which is a heinous offence in the eyes of those who claim such a letter necessary."

"In what way does his compass differ from the one we are using?"

"It would take me too long to explain, and I question if it were possible, no matter how hard I might try. It has several magnets suspended by silk cords, and is made of aluminum. The variations cannot be as great with his instrument, and more easily corrected."

“Why does a needle vary from the true direction?”

“Now you’ve asked me a puzzler,” Ben replied, with a hearty laugh. “As a matter of fact, I never heard that any one had solved that question; but there are very many theories, some plausible and others foolish.”

“Would it be possible for you to find out if this one is correct?”

“Not without swinging to some true bearing on shore; I shall compare it with the *Sportsman’s* when we arrive at Hong Kong, provided, of course, I am allowed to remain in command.”

“I sincerely hope there will be no change of captain,” the young girl said, earnestly; “for, after what has happened, I am quite positive you will be able to take the little ship home as well, if not better, than any one who could be found in Hong Kong.”

“Now, that’s what I call getting a long leg to windward,” Ben said, with a hearty laugh. “With you on my side I count myself in full command.”

“How do you make that out? I don’t fancy the consignees would take any advice from me.”

“They could n’t help it. All you’ve got to do is to look at them once, and they’re done for, so far as having any opinion of their own is concerned.”

Now it was Miss Dunham’s turn to laugh, which she did right merrily, and before an hour had passed the two felt as well acquainted as if they had known each other for years, instead of only a few hours.

“Have you been in the China Seas before, captain?”

she asked, after an unusually long pause, during which Ben had been scanning her face, as if mentally deciding how thoroughly helpless any consignee would be in her presence.

“Never.”

“And do you count on being able to take the brig into port without a pilot?”

“I have n’t got so far as that in my thinking. I suppose, as a matter of fact, I must take one aboard. You see I only figured on getting possession of the craft, and running up the coast. I did n’t spend much time on the details after that should have been done.” Then a sudden thought occurred to him, and he added quickly, “Who knows but that one of our crew is familiar with these waters?”

“Would you trust either of them if he should profess to be?”

“I would so long as I could stand over him with a revolver. I reckon if he knew that a bullet in his head would be the price of the brig’s touching bottom, we should go through without any trouble.”

Then, without waiting to hear her opinion on the subject, Ben called to him the fellow who apparently best understood what he said when the orders had previously been given.

The man slouched aft in a hangdog fashion without raising his eyes, and stood in front of the young captain, waiting to be questioned.

“Now see here, my fine fellow, you understand English, don’t you?”

The man looked at him with a vacant expression on his face, and Ben added sharply :

“ I know very well you do, from the way you acted when you were first found on board. I’ve got a perfect right to treat you just as we treated some of your friends this afternoon, and the law would uphold me in it without any question. Instead of having you hanged for attempted piracy, I propose to pay for your services until we reach Hong Kong, which is a good deal more than most ship-masters would do ; but there is a chance I might change my mind about that, even now, so it stands you and your friends in hand to walk pretty straight. Tell me, do you know the coast from here to Hong Kong ? ”

The fellow waited an instant, as if trying to decide whether it would be advisable to admit he understood what was said, and then it may have been the look of determination in the young captain’s eye which warned him it would be neither wise nor safe to continue as he had begun, therefore he replied in the villainous dialect called “ pidgin-English, ” that he had piloted vessels to Macao.

“ Were you never in Hong Kong ? ”

Ben understood him to say he had visited that city, but could not be trusted to pilot a vessel there.

“ Can you take this brig into Macao without difficulty ? ”

The man nodded his head in a positive manner.

“ But what good would it do to go to Macao when the consignees are in Hong Kong ? ” Miss Dunham asked, as Ben hesitated a moment, evidently considering whether or no he should utilise this prisoner of his as a pilot.

"We should be quite as well off there, since it is only thirty-eight miles across to Hong Kong, and I am not certain but I would rather have the brig in that port in furtherance of my own plans."

"I did not mean to question anything you did in the matter, but only asked from curiosity. If it would improve your chance of getting command by going there, let us do so by all means."

"I think I will try it," Ben said, hesitatingly, and then, as if having fully made up his mind, he turned again to the Chinaman.

"You shall take us to Macao. As I said before, all three of you will be paid for such work as is performed, and I want you to be very careful that you understand this portion of the bargain, in order to explain it to your friends. I intend to run the risk of allowing you to pilot the brig into port, but, at the same time, I shall take the precaution of keeping a mighty strict watch, and at the least sign of treachery there will be trouble for all three. I sha' n't make any allowance for ignorance, and it will go hard with your precious bodies if, by the slightest mistake, this craft touches bottom before our anchors are down in port."

The fellow did not seem to think there was any necessity of his replying to these statements, and remained silent and motionless in front of the young captain, until the latter asked impatiently :

"Did you understand all I said?"

The man nodded.

“And are you willing to go on under these terms?”

A shrug of the shoulders, decidedly Frenchy in its way, was sufficient to signify that he had no other alternative, and Ben ordered him forward once more, saying to Miss Dunham when they were comparatively alone again :

“I suppose father would refuse to accept of any such assistance; but he has never been in a position exactly like this, therefore it is not for me to speculate upon what he would or would not do; I shall take the chances, and, if keeping those fellows in my sight every moment will insure success to my plans, by this time to-morrow we should be drawing near Macao.”

“Do you know anything about the place?”

“No; but if you will go into your father’s room you will find a work on the China Seas, in which, unless I am mistaken, a brief description of the town may be found. Suppose you look the matter up for the information of both?”

Miss Dunham acted upon the suggestion, and returned a few moments later with an open volume in her hand, holding it while Ben read the following :

“Macao (A-Ma-ngao, ‘Harbor of the Goddess A-Ma;’ Portuguese, Macau), a Portuguese settlement on the coast of China. It consists of a tongue of land one and a half square miles in extent, running south-southwest from the island of Hiang Shang (Portuguese, Au-cam), on the western side of the estuary of the Canton River. Bold and rocky hills about three hundred feet in height occupy both extremities of the peninsula, the picturesque-looking city, with its flat-roofed houses painted blue, green, and red, lying in the far from level stretch of ground between. The forts are effective additions to the general view, but do not add much to the real strength of the place.”

After having satisfied their curiosity regarding the port toward which circumstances directed them, Miss Dunham was no longer particularly interested in Macao ; but seemed anxious to learn what Ben's chances were for gaining permanent command of the brig, and it pleased him not a little when she expressed fear lest something might occur to prevent this consummation of his desires.

"I suppose there is less chance of finding a master without a ship in this port than there would be at Hong Kong ?" she suggested.

"That would n't make any difference," Ben replied. "The two ports are so near together that there would be no difficulty in sending a man from one to the other at a moment's notice. My only idea was that I should of a necessity be forced to remain considerably longer on board, and of course every day I stay by the brig makes my chances so much the better."

"Do you intend to go to Hong Kong immediately after arriving ?"

"As soon after as is possible."

"Would you do so if you were really in command of the brig ?"

"No, I should content myself with sending a message, and attend to getting her into some kind of a decent condition before making a personal report."

The young girl was silent for a moment, and then asked, suddenly :

"Whom would you send if you had a full crew aboard ?"

"Well, most likely, the mate, for I should prefer to re-

main here myself to see that the brig was in proper condition before starting on the voyage, which would require considerable time."

"Why not send your mate as it is? She can't do anything toward fitting out the ship; but may be able to accomplish considerable with the agents."

"Are you proposing to go to Hong Kong yourself?" Ben asked, in surprise.

"I must be very stupid in the manner of expressing myself if you don't understand that by this time."

"But do you mean to propose to speak with the agents about my taking the brig home?"

"Certainly;" and then, looking up at him with a merry twinkle in her eyes, she added: "Did n't you say that any agent or consignee would be powerless if I stood before him once?"

"Well, I meant it!" Ben cried, bringing his hand down on the spoke of the wheel with a resounding slap, to give greater emphasis to the words. "If you go to report the arrival of the *Progressive Age*, there is no doubt but that I shall be appointed captain, provided you say the word."

"I shall say the word, and now all you have to do is attend to shipping your mate off as soon as we are at anchor. In addition to calling on the agents, I shall pay a visit to the *Sportsman*, and tell Captain Thompson what a brave son he has."

"Well, there I am afraid you will fail," Ben said, laughingly. "While I am ready to take oath that any

man must accept what you say as law and gospel, it would be a pretty difficult job to persuade father I am anything more than a reasonably poor specimen of a sailor. However, I would like to have him meet you, indeed I would, and the first officer, too! It would be worth a month's wages if old Short could see a handsome girl like you on the quarter-deck of the *Sportsman* for five minutes or so."

"Is this Mr. Short as lavish with his compliments as you are? Or does n't that quality extend aft of the forecastle?"

"I never saw the first mate when he had as good a chance as I have got; but I tell you what it is, Miss Dunham, he's sailor enough to be able to run all around me in such things, for he's been to sea longer. You know there's nothing in this wide world that will awaken a shellback's enthusiasm so quick as a pretty girl."

A ringing laugh followed this very gallant and seaman-like speech, and then, dismissing pleasantry for business, Miss Dunham began to discuss the details of the proposed trip, Ben charging her with such messages as he wished delivered to Mr. Short, for he believed that gentleman might be of great assistance in procuring him the coveted command.

It was past midnight before this topic of conversation was exhausted, and then the young captain insisted once more that his "mate" should retire; but she was as determined as ever to remain on deck. The only compromise she would accept was to allow him to bring some

wraps, that she might be protected from the night air, in case her eyes did close in slumber despite her will.

The wind had freshened considerably ; but under such a scanty supply of canvas as the brig was, there would have been no necessity for shortening it even if a gale had sprung up, and Ben considered the advisability of attempting to show more sail, despite the small crew at his command.

He decided against anything of the kind, however, in view of the fact that it could not be taken in at short notice by his three sailors, and forced himself to be content with the slow but safe progress the brig was then making.

The Chinese were lying on the deck near the galley, curled up like rats in a spare sail, and from certain nasal sounds which proceeded from the kitchen, it was evident Uncle Eliphilet's fears had been soothed by slumber.

To Ben's satisfaction, Miss Dunham was finally forced to yield to the embrace of the drowsy god, and during the last four hours of the night she slept as peacefully as if in her own room below.

The young captain was running by the chart, and had no need of his alleged pilot's services until they should draw nearer their destination ; therefore, so far as could be seen, he was not only in command, but had sole care of the brig during the greater portion of the hours of darkness.

Miss Dunham awakened when the first rays of the rising sun glinted the waters with a golden radiance, and,

starting to her feet as if she had just detected herself in an act of wrong doing, she exclaimed :

“ I’m afraid I have been asleep.”

“ I reckon you have,” Ben replied, grimly. “ According to all appearances it’s been a four-hour nap, which is about as much rest as the mate of a brig ought to have at one time.”

“ I’ll make amends by taking the wheel while you lie down a few moments.”

“ That kind of an apology is unnecessary, because I should not be able to go to sleep if I turned in; and it is enough for me if you have gained some rest. You may take the helm a few moments, if you will, while I shake Eliphilet up into cooking condition, for he has n’t shown his face outside that galley yet. I didn’t dare call him for fear of awakening you.”

Miss Dunham stepped to the wheel, and Ben went forward, looking back an instant just as he arrived at the galley.

He had never seen a prettier picture than that presented by the young girl, as she stood in a flood of golden light, the wind tossing her brown hair here and there until it shone in the sunbeams like films of silk, her cheeks glowing, her eyes sparkling, and every movement replete with grace and the buoyancy of life.

“ Talk about mates!” Ben said to himself. “ There’s one any captain would be proud of,” and, thanks to the charming picture which she presented, his call to the steward was less harsh than it would have been, for there

was an indescribable softness in his heart, new-born, which would not permit of the sailor-like language it was natural for him to use.

The Chinamen were on their feet instantly he summoned Uncle Eliphilet, and, without waiting for orders, the one who had taken upon himself the duties of pilot directed the others to continue the half-completed work of cleaning the decks.

"That's right," Ben said, approvingly. "Do all you can, my hearties, and if you keep at it like men there shall be nothing said about my finding you on board under such suspicious circumstances."

It surely seemed as if the young captain's troubles had come to an end with the defeat of the pirates, for no shipmaster ever had an easier time getting into port than he, from the moment the *Progressive Age* left the island.

It is true that with a larger crew she would have made very much better time; but speed was of no particular importance so far as his scheme, or the safety of the craft, was concerned, and he was not at all impatient because of the slow progress.

The Chinese pilot understood, beyond a question, that his only hope of escaping from the dangerous position in which he had placed himself was by rendering all the assistance in his power, and he performed the task which Ben required of him in a thoroughly efficient manner.

The *Progressive Age* came to an anchor in the harbor of Macao on the forenoon of the second day after leaving Nampang Island, and, paying the men what he considered

a generous amount for their services, Ben had the only remaining boat lowered in readiness for going on shore, explaining to his crew of prisoners that they should be discharged as soon as the gig was pulled to the land.

Miss Dunham, eager to begin the work which she believed would result in the appointment of Ben to the position of captain of the brig, was ready for the journey to Hong Kong before the anchors had been dropped, and, in less than ten minutes from the time of arrival, she and the young captain were on the Great Quay seeking information as to the time for the regular Hong Kong steamers to sail.

"It seems like shirking my duty to send you alone," he said, after all the arrangements had been made, and he was about to take his leave of her. "Perhaps I ought to go, although I am positive I would not succeed as well as you."

"There's no reason why you should say anything of the kind. The matter has been decided upon, and it only remains to ask if there are other instructions to give me?"

"Bless your heart, no. You understand the position of affairs quite as well as I do, and, I am satisfied, will transact the business a great deal better. When shall I hear from you?"

"I don't think you need expect any word, for if I am successful I shall come back at once in order to bring the good news, and, in case of failure, it will be equally necessary to return for my belongings, since I shall not go home in the brig if a stranger takes command."

Then, clasping for a single moment his outstretched hand, she turned away, and Ben bent his steps toward the office of the consul, thinking to himself that he was making rapid strides in the acquaintanceship of this young woman, if she no longer considered him a stranger.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS DUNHAM'S RETURN.

BEN had spent, in paying for his passage from Hong Kong to Nampang Island, and in settling with his crew, nearly all the small amount of money which he received from his father as wages, but now that the brig was in port there was really no necessity for ready cash, since any of the merchants would willingly have advanced a reasonable sum on a distress note signed by him as captain.

His first visit, after parting with Miss Dunham, was to the American consul, for the purpose of learning where sailors could be procured, and before nightfall he had four experienced hands busily engaged in setting the little craft to rights.

When evening came, and matters on board were looking very much as they should, Ben allowed himself, for the first time since having left the *Sportsman*, to indulge in rest, and as he went below to turn in it was with the thought that at last he occupied in a proper manner the position of captain, even though it might be only for a short time.

The men whom he had employed could stand the anchor watches, and there were yet sufficient provisions to furnish them with the necessaries of life, consequently he

had no mental disquietude concerning the immediate future.

It can well be fancied how sound his slumbers were on that night, and decidedly refreshing in more senses than one, for ever and again would come to him, borne by the dream elves, a certain rosy-cheeked face and sparkling eyes, over which the brown hair was blown by the wind like films of the sheeniest silk.

When he awakened next morning it was with the feeling that he would have been almost willing to forego the satisfaction of being in truth the commander of the *Progressive Age*, if he could have his "mate" with him then, instead of at Hong Kong, even though she was there working in his interest.

There was too much labour to be performed, however, to permit of his building air-castles, and he set about the tasks of the day in the most energetic fashion.

Again did it seem as if fortune was determined to shower all possible blessings upon him, for, before noon, a merchant came on board with a proposition of the most advantageous freight direct to New York, and, after some bargaining, Ben closed the trade.

He had every reason to congratulate himself, not only upon having rescued the brig from the dangerous position in which the original crew had left her, but on having made such arrangements for the voyage home as must unquestionably prove in the highest degree satisfactory to the owners.

"I wish she had waited one day longer, and taken with

her the news of this charter," Ben said to himself, when the merchant left him, promising to send a tug to convey the brig to the dock where she was to take in the cargo ; "for if they refuse to give me command, thinking I have not already done enough to prove my worthiness, it seems as if this trade should clinch the business. However, I'll go ahead as if I really was the captain, and if I don't continue in the berth it won't be either Miss Dunham's fault or my own."

Twenty-four hours later the brig was in the hands of the stevedores, and Ben had already ordered such a supply of provisions as he thought would suffice for the voyage across the ocean.

He did not attempt to victual the ship in what he considered a proper manner, but with due reference to economy, knowing full well how this would count in the eyes of the owners, and, in fact, concluded so much business with nothing but his power of attorney to prove his authority, that it would have been an awkward matter, to say the least, for the agents to have appointed another captain of the vessel.

On the afternoon of the third day after Miss Dunham's departure, Ben was in the cabin checking off the list of stores, when he was both surprised and delighted to see first his father, and then the young girl, enter.

" You see I have brought the master of the *Sportsman* with me, Captain Thompson," Miss Dunham cried, cheerily, laying particular emphasis on Ben's title, and springing quickly to his feet, he said, interrogatively :

“Then you succeeded?”

“Did n’t you say it would be impossible for me to fail?”

“And I have proved a good prophet?”

“You surely have in this case, for you are in command of the *Progressive Age*, as your father can tell you.”

“Yes, boy, you have succeeded,” the elder captain said, grimly, as he seated himself at the head of the table, “and I won’t say that you would n’t have done so even without as able an advocate as you sent. But she truly smoothed matters to a wonderful degree, and I believe Mr. Short would have had an attack of apoplexy if all her demands had not been complied with. She has completely captured that old shellback. How is it that you are loading?”

Ben explained to his father what he had done, giving all the details of the charter, and adding in conclusion :

“I hope the arrangements which I have made will prove satisfactory.”

“They could not fail of that, for you have succeeded in getting an unusually good freight, and provisioned your ship very economically; almost too much so, perhaps, but that is a good fault in a young captain.”

“Don’t you care to know how I got the vessel away?” Ben asked, disappointed because his father did not appear at all curious on that point.

“Why bless you, boy, Mr. Short and I heard all the details, and with a deal of colouring I can assure you, before Miss Dunham had been aboard the *Sportsman* two hours.

She would have made us listen whether we wanted to or not, so determined was she to sing your praises."

Ben looked up quickly at the young girl, and she added, archly :

"I only did that because I wanted to enlist your father and Mr. Short in your behalf. Of course, you know I said a good many things I did n't believe."

"Then perhaps I ought not to thank you, if I owe my position as captain to any misrepresentations on your part," Ben replied, with an assumption of gravity he was very far from feeling.

"But to the agents and consul I told only the facts," the young woman replied, now quite serious. "I fancied your father and Mr. Short would be more interested in a highly coloured picture of your exploits, therefore laid the paint on as thickly as was consistent with a semblance of truth."

"Did you overexert yourself to such an extent that father thought it necessary to come back with you?"

"I will trust her to go anywhere alone," the older captain said, quickly. "I am here as representative of the owners to decide with you upon the general details of the voyage; but it would seem as if my visit was unnecessary, since you are so nearly ready for sea. I fancy there is little for me to do except make a friendly visit and go back. I must congratulate you, my son, however, upon the manner in which you have done this work, and say that you thoroughly deserve the command of the brig, even though you did jump directly from the forecastle to the cabin. As

matters have turned, I am inclined to think it was a good idea to send a boy for the craft, rather than an experienced master, for no one but a man before the mast would have taken the chances of putting to sea with such a crew as you had."

"Well, for the matter of that, it strikes me that I didn't have very much choice," Ben replied, laughingly. "It was a question of weighing anchor or staying there to be murdered, and I quite naturally wanted to keep the breath of life in my body a few days more."

"How long before you will be ready to put to sea?"

"Three or four days, according to the way the cargo is being rushed aboard. You see my charter calls for the utmost despatch, and they seem to be filling their part of the contract to the queen's taste. Will you have a look at the brig, sir?"

"No, I fancy not, unless there is some particular reason for my doing so. I know her pretty well, and have been aboard many times when this young lady's father was in command."

Then the elder captain gave his son some good advice relative to the voyage which was to be so soon begun, and, refusing an invitation to remain over night, on the plea that he wanted to go on the next steamer to Hong Kong, took his departure as he said :

"Of course you will visit the agents before you leave, consequently I shall see you on board the *Sportsman* within the next two or three days."

Then the young people were left alone, and Ben, after

ordering Eliphilet to serve a lunch in the cabin, said to Miss Dunham, who had by this time removed her travelling costume for the one she ordinarily wore on shipboard, and returned to the saloon :

“ At last I am captain, and it will be hard lines if I ever have to go back to the forecastle again. It is to you I owe this decidedly pleasant change of position, and I want you to understand how grateful I am for what has been done.”

“ I prefer you would n’t talk in that way, captain. You yourself earned the promotion, and are giving me the credit simply because I brought the good news. As a matter of fact I had nothing to do with the appointment, other than telling the truth regarding what you have done since coming aboard. You never would have been made captain of this brig if you had not deserved it, consequently no gratitude is due me.”

Then Miss Dunham gave a detailed account of her visit to Hong Kong, explaining what had been said to her by the agents of the brig’s owners, how little persuasion was necessary to gain the young captain’s appointment after it was known what he had done, and concluded with an eulogy on Mr. Short.

“ He seems to think you were intended by nature for a sailor, and, so far as colouring any story relative to you is concerned, I could not begin with him. It seemed as if he would never tire of hearing me tell about what you had done.”

“ A dear, good friend of mine, is Short,” Ben replied,

thoughtfully, "and many a time, when father has thought it necessary for my good to use stronger discipline than he would in the case of one of the other sailors, I know the old man has interfered in my behalf. It is queer that I have been thinking so much of a visit to Hong Kong, and shall now leave port without really having seen it. As a matter of fact I haven't even a general idea of what the place is like."

"Then I would advise you to adopt the same course which you recommended to me," Miss Dunham said, laughingly.

"What is that?"

"Study from the volume you gave me when I inquired regarding Macao. Here it is," she added, taking the book from the table, "and I will read it to you."

Then Ben listened to the following:

"Hong Kong, properly Hiang-Kiang (the place of sweet streams), an important British island possession, situated off the southeast coast of China, opposite the province Kwang-tung, on the east side of the estuary of the Chu-Kiang or Canton River, thirty-eight miles east of Macao and seventy-five southeast of Canton. It is one of a small cluster named by the Portuguese, Ladrones or Thieves, on account of the notorious habits of their old inhabitants. Extremely irregular in outline, it has an area of twenty-nine square miles.

"From the mainland it is separated by a narrow channel, which at Hong Kong roads, between Victoria, the island capital, and Kan-lung Point, is about one mile broad, and which narrows at Ly-ce-moon Pass to little over a quarter of a mile. The best anchorage is in Hong Kong roads, where, over good holding ground, the depth is five to nine fathoms. The inner anchorage of Victoria Bay, about

half a mile off shore and out of the strength of the tide, is six to seven fathoms. Victoria, the seat alike of government and trade, is the chief centre of population, but in recent years a tract of four square miles on the mainland has been covered with public buildings and villa residences.

" Practically an outlying suburb of Victoria, Kan-lung (Nine Dragons), or as it is commonly called, Konloon, is free from the extreme heat of the capital, being exposed to the southwest monsoon. The buildings of Victoria, mostly of stone and brick, are greatly superior to those of the Chinese city. The merchants' houses are elegant and spacious, with broad verandas and tasteful gardens.

" Including the Chinese town, Victoria extends for three miles along the bay, toward which it slopes from the base of the hills. It is lighted with gas, and supplied with water from an enormous reservoir. The main thoroughfare is protected by a massive sea-wall. The streets are guarded by a strong force of Indian sepoys, and the natives are not allowed to go abroad after eight o'clock without a pass. The common mode of street conveyance is by chairs, while the passage across to Kan-lung is usually effected in sampans or pull-away boats."

" Well, I suppose I ought to know something about Hong Kong from that description," Ben said, as Miss Dunham laid down the book; " but I had a great deal rather see it than accept any such account."

" You 'll have an opportunity for a hurried glimpse when you visit the agents, and at some later day,—for of course a sea-captain as well-known as you will be after this voyage must necessarily anchor in that port many times in his life,—you can enjoy yourself to the utmost, for it is a pleasant place."

" You have been there before?"

"I spent four weeks ashore on the last voyage, and more than once went into the interior of the country. Here comes Eliphilet with the lunch, and I am so hungry that it seems as if it would be possible to devour everything he has prepared."

"I have seen to it that your table will be supplied better in the future than it was when I first saw you, and during the voyage home you won't have an opportunity of complaining that there are not delicacies enough on board."

Before the old darkey could arrange the food, it was necessary Miss Dunham assure him she had not suffered in any way during her absence from the brig, and only when his curiosity was fully gratified did he proceed with the regular work.

"Captain Thompson is to take the brig home, Eliphilet," she said, gleefully. "How do you like the idea?"

"I hasn't got er word to complain, missy, ef he brings back dem knives what am done gone los' from de galley."

"But I understood you threw them overboard at the pirates."

"It mought er bin, missy, kase I don' rightly 'member 'bout dat scrimmage; but does it stan' to reason dat a fus'-class cook like yer ole uncle would er done sich a reckless job?"

"I can't say as to that," the young girl replied, with a merry laugh; "but it is certain you were reckless enough

to have done almost anything when the pirates attacked us."

"I will see that you are well supplied with cutlery, uncle," Ben added, and, thus assured, the old darkey toddled back to the galley, leaving the young people to enjoy the lunch and each other's society.

From this time until the brig left port, Ben had plenty with which to occupy his attention, as can well be fancied.

It had been his intention to attend personally to every detail of fitting the vessel for sea, but so rapidly was the cargo put on board, that, in order to make the visit to Hong Kong, it was necessary he should trust the very important duty of seeing to the water supply to one of the sailors, whom he proposed to ship as second mate.

On the second day after Miss Dunham's return he took the steamer for Hong Kong, and there, in the shortest possible space of time, finished up such business with the agents as was necessary before leaving.

He found his praises had been sung by Miss Dunham quite as warmly as he deserved, and the congratulations which he received were well calculated to turn the head of a stronger minded man.

At the office of both the consul and the agents he was forced to repeat the story of his adventures with the pirates, and it was so late in the day when he arrived at Pedder's Wharf, where he was to hire a boat to carry him to the *Sportsman*, as to preclude all possibility of his return to Macao that night.

On hailing a sampan, he was surprised at seeing the

craft swing suddenly around in front of the landing stage, and her crew pull away with the utmost despatch, until he recognised in them the same men whom he had hired to carry him to Nampang Island.

"I reckon that settles the question as to whether they knew anything about the attack which was to be made," Ben said, grimly. "They are idiots to think I could do them any harm, for it would be impossible to prove the story; but I'd like to have hold of that yellow fellow long enough to choke into him some idea of honest dealing. He'd never leave another white man to be murdered by his villainous friends, I'll guarantee that."

The owner of the sampan was fully determined not to give him any such opportunity, and, by the time Ben reached the *Sportsman*, the unpleasant incident of seeing this disagreeably familiar face was nearly forgotten.

It can be well fancied what a warm reception he met with both in the cabin and the forecastle of the ship.

From Mr. Short's expressions of pleasure and satisfaction at the young man's promotion, one would have fancied he was directly concerned in the matter, and Ben rendered the old man's joy more complete by saying :

"I have to thank you as much as any one else for this thing, Mr. Short."

"Nonsense, boy, nonsense!" What did I have to do with it? I didn't go down the coast an' tackle a lot of murderin' heathen."

"No; but you did a good bit toward helping me get there, for I'd had precious little chance to talk with the

agents first if father had gotten hold of the story. Most likely a captain would have been appointed before I went ashore, but for your assistance."

It was evident the old man was pleased at being thus regarded as a benefactor, and during the time Ben remained on the ship he did not lose an opportunity to give him good advice, or make suggestions as to the proper course for a young captain to pursue under various supposititious circumstances.

It would have pleased Mr. Short only too well if Ben had borrowed from him every chart and nautical instrument he owned; but the kindly offers were refused on the plea that the brig was plentifully supplied with such articles.

The captain of the *Sportsman* did not burden his son with counsel as to his future line of conduct, but dismissed the matter in these few words, when, on the following morning, Ben was on the point of taking his departure:

"I reckon, my son, that you can be trusted to look out for the craft now under your command. Don't take too many chances, and remember that on the success of this voyage depends your career as a sailing-master. An error of judgment now would always count against you, no matter how many brilliant things you might do in the future."

It is safe to say that Ben was followed by the good wishes of every person on board the *Sportsman* when he left to rejoin his vessel, and it would have been strange

indeed if he had not felt very proud at having thus so suddenly and decidedly bettered his prospects in life.

On the passenger steamer bound for Macao he met the man who was recommended by the agents for the position of first mate, and felt quite satisfied he would be pleased with this assistant.

Jacob Bean was the mate's name, and a typical Yankee he was.

A young man, not more than four years Ben's senior, and one who had the reputation of understanding his business thoroughly.

"Is this your first voyage as chief mate?" Ben asked him when they had been introduced.

"Yes, sir."

"And it is mine as captain, so there will be two green ones together."

"It would not be safe to call you green, sir, after what I hear you did around Nampang Island, and if all the agents say is true, I am mighty lucky to have gotten in with such a captain. Grit and sand are what I like, and there isn't a man in Hong Kong to-day who won't say you have got plenty of that kind of stock in trade."

"Well, you see, Mr. Bean, it's just likely all the stories you heard about me may not be true."

"We'll admit it, sir, and yet the fact remains that the brig is at Macao, and was brought there by you, with only three pirates as a crew. That was a pretty bold stroke, setting those fellows at work after you had captured them."

"It was a case of necessity rather than boldness. I had to have some one, so took what material I found on hand."

As a matter of course the young man was pleased at being praised, as is almost any one, and he truly got enough to satisfy the most avaricious in such matters before they arrived at Macao.

Then there was sufficient work for both the officers to prevent any further discussion regarding the adventures on the coast, for the brig was loaded, and the shipping agents had sent word that the crew would be on board that evening, a pilot having already been engaged to take the little craft to sea.

CHAPTER IX.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

REFERRING to the young captain's private journal of the voyage, the following are the first entries found :

“ MONDAY, October 29th.

“ 4 P. M. Crew came on board all drunk. 8 P. M. Pilot came on board. 11 P. M. Tide coming fair, we beat out to the outer roads. 4 A. M. Dropped anchor.”

“ TUESDAY, October 30th.

“ 6 A. M. Wind being fair, got under way with all sail, and proceeded to sea. 9 A. M. Pilot left. 12 M. The great Ladrone Island bore N.E. by E. dist. 14 miles, from which I took my departure, steering S.S.W. The day ends in light breezes and fine weather.”

During the general excitement and confusion attendant upon getting under way, Ben had but little time to indulge in conversation with Miss Dunham.

An older and more experienced sailing-master would have intrusted the greater portion of the work to the first and second officers; but he felt such a sense of responsibility that it seemed absolutely necessary he should attend in person to everything which was done, and when, as is shown by the first entry in his private journal, the

crew came on board intoxicated, it caused him no slight amount of worriment and vexation.

He had seen such a state of affairs on his father's ship each time she was made ready for sea, for, as a rule, the sailor spends his last hour on shore in befuddling his brain with liquor, and is seldom fit for duty until his craft is out of sight of land.

Ben knew perfectly well that he was allowing himself to be troubled by trifles, and there were ever in his mind the parting words of his father, to the effect that on the success of this voyage depended his future career as a shipmaster. What in other captains would be overlooked, in him would count as the gravest errors of judgment, therefore he had determined to watch his officers and crew as closely as if from them he feared foul play.

The first and second mates understood that their captain was taking too much upon himself, but they fully appreciated his position, and the feelings which caused him to interfere, oftentimes unwarrantably, in their departments, therefore, instead of insisting they should be left unhampered in their movements, as probably would have been the case if they had shipped under an older man, both took good-naturedly all his superfluous as well as necessary commands and advice.

Miss Dunham also observed the young captain's anxious movements, and Tuesday forenoon, half an hour or more after the pilot had left the ship, she came on to the quarter-deck where Ben was pacing to and fro as if on the lookout.

He was conscious of having neglected her somewhat since his return from Hong Kong, and said, as she approached and took his arm for a promenade :

“ You are too good a sailor to fancy any explanation is due from me regarding what may have seemed like neglect, for you know the responsibility which rests upon a captain, particularly when he is starting out on a long voyage with a ship in not exactly as good a condition as he could ask for.”

“ Yes, I understand it all,” she said, with a smile, “ and hope you won’t be offended, captain, when I say I think you are fretting yourself unnecessarily about trifles. Of course you feel anxious ; that is only natural, but if you keep on at this rate you will never live to see New York, for you are literally worrying yourself to death.”

“ There’s no danger of that,” Ben replied, with a laugh. “ I can stand a good deal of mental trouble before knocking under.”

“ That may be ; but you’ll wear yourself down to a shadow. Why not take things as your father would ? ”

“ It is hardly reasonable to expect a fellow to put on the airs of an old shellback, when he finds himself in command for the first time ; but it ’ll wear off before we make Good Hope. You see I’m like a boy with a new suit of clothes — he does n’t feel quite at home. You would n’t see much evidence of nervousness if I was in the forecastle.”

“ I shall expect each day to see less evidence of it in the cabin. It is necessary for your own sake that you

cease trying to do the work of all the officers. We have had a good start, it could n't be better, wind fair, enough of it, not too much, and apparently everything in our favour. What are so many of the crew doing aloft?"

"They are setting up the rigging ; getting things snug for the voyage. There 's a good deal to be done yet, and we want to utilise this pleasant weather."

Miss Dunham realised fully the necessity of doing something to relieve the mental strain upon the young commander's mind, and at once feigned an interest in the method of striking the hours on the ship's bell.

"Is time kept on naval vessels as it is in the merchant service ?" she asked, innocently.

Ben, thinking she was really eager for information, fell into the trap at once, and, during the half-hour which followed, it is safe to say he ceased to feel the dreadful weight of responsibility which was nearly overpowering him, so interested did he become in his own narrative.

"The bell is of greater importance on ships of war," he began. "Of course the nautical day begins the same, when eight bells is struck. It 's a form which must not be omitted, or woe to the officer of the deck. It is struck half-hourly, day and night, one stroke being added for each half-hour until eight is reached, when the count begins at one bell. It is curious that the British navy is the only one in the world which does not adhere to this rule."

"Why should they have a different method of marking time ?" Miss Dunham asked.

"It is not essentially different, but there is a curious

omission. It is said that, before the British naval mutinies of 1797, the bells were struck as on the ships of other nations; but in one of these mutinies the signal agreed upon was the stroke of five bells, half-past six in the afternoon. When that signal came the mutineers rose to slay the officers. In the fight which followed, the officers upon one ship were driven over the starboard side, and the mutineers for a time were in possession of the craft. When order was restored throughout the navy the stroke of five bells in the second dog-watch was dropped from its place in sequence, although at all other times it is used. The stroke in the British navy for half-past six in the afternoon is one bell, at seven two bells, and half-past seven three bells; but at eight it is eight bells. From that hour until the second dog-watch again, the sequence of strokes is the same as in our navy."

"That is a singular way of keeping alive the memories of a mutiny."

"It is still further remembered, if tradition is to be trusted, for the common practice in the British navy of having officers assemble on the port side of the ship, and men on the starboard, is also traced to the same cause. For nearly an hundred years the starboard side, whence the officers retreated before the mutineers, has been esteemed disgraced, and only just now is the British navy returning to the custom of other navies, and making the starboard the 'dress' side of the ship. In our war vessels, and I suppose it is the same all over the world, the captain's orderly keeps the time, and reports to the

officer of the deck the hour. The officer then bids the messenger of the watch to strike the bell. There is more formality at eight bells; then the hour is reported to the captain, and the bell is not struck until he has said, 'Make it so.' When ships are cruising in squadrons, with a stiff disciplinarian for admiral, the whole fleet, if lying in port, awaits the flagship's bells, for that craft is the timekeeper of the fleet, and shortly before seven bells in the morning-watch a time signal is displayed by her. At exactly half-past seven this drops, the clocks on all the ships are set, and seven bells is struck throughout the fleet."

"If I continue to learn at this rate I shall soon consider myself prepared for a position as midshipman at the very least," Miss Dunham said, laughingly.

"Then it would, perhaps, be best to get the whole of this lesson. When I am giving a lecture on bells, I don't like to be cut out of any part of it."

"I won't interrupt again," was the mock-penitent reply; "but really, I thought you had finished."

"When a ship carries a chaplain, the bell is tolled for service Sunday morning; but is silent during a funeral. It is also the fire signal, except in action, when it is not used, lest the knowledge that there is a fire on board should throw the crew into a panic and distract the men from their business of fighting. The bell is employed by all nations, save the Turks, as a fog signal. When a ship lies at anchor in a fog, the bell is kept going with strokes in sets of threes, separated by a short interval. The

Turks, who have a distrust of bells, use drums for this purpose. The tolling for church, single strokes separated by a short interval, cannot be mistaken for the rapid, irregular fire-alarm, nor can either of these be confused with the triple fog signal. The time bells are different from any of these; they are sounded in pairs with a short interval, and the odd number, if there is one, is sounded last."

At this moment Ben's attention was attracted to some work which one of the men was doing in a slovenly manner, and, by the time he had called the first officer's attention to the matter, he was no longer in the mood for "lecturing."

Miss Dunham did not remain on deck many moments after this. When the young captain attempted to take up the conversation again, she could see his mind was on his vessel to the exclusion of everything else, and thought it best to go below, leaving Ben pacing the quarter-deck nervously, as if his very life depended upon taking a certain number of steps in a given number of minutes.

Thursday morning found the little brig becalmed.

When the captain had turned in, simply because fatigue of body forced him against his inclination, the wind was fined down to such an extent that he had every reason to expect it would soon die away entirely, and when he came on deck some of the men whose watch it was below were amusing themselves by trying to entice a murderous looking shark, which had been circling around the ship in

search of prey, to swallow a fat piece of salt pork, with which a hook had been baited.

"If they catch that fellow it will put an end to this calm," Mr. Bean said, as he saluted the young commander.

"Any one could see that you didn't come aboard through the cabin windows," Ben replied, laughingly, "for nowhere, except in the forecastle, can a man be educated in the belief that a gale must avenge a shark's death."

"Whether I got it forward or aft, I believe it just the same," the first officer replied, decidedly. "I have seen that saying verified too many times to doubt it."

"Well, I hope at least a portion of it will come true in this case, for, besides needing a wind, there'd be a chance to learn how much faith can be put in it. They have hooked their fish, I see."

It was as Ben said. The shark had allowed himself to become fastened to the steel, and was now thrashing around at a lively rate trying to regain his liberty, while the sailors, not daring to pull him out by the head, were making every effort to get a slip-noose around his body, by which he might be hoisted on board.

After fifteen or twenty minutes of reasonably hard work, their labours were rewarded, and soon the huge fish was hanging by the tail, while the men proceeded to wreak their vengeance on the man-eater for the possible injury he had inflicted upon others of their calling.

With all at work, it was not long before the shark was dead, and when as many slices were cut from his body as

the crew thought they could conveniently dispose of during the day, the remainder was dropped overboard, and the decks washed.

“Now we’ve got an opportunity to test the superstition,” Ben said, with a laugh, as old Eliphilet announced that breakfast was served, and Mr. Bean replied very positively :

“Yes, sir, and before night we shall be scudding under considerably less canvas than we have got now.”

“It won’t do us any harm to get a taste of something in the way of wind, although I don’t fancy we should have to wait many hours even if the shark had not been killed. It isn’t likely a calm can last very long in October.”

At that moment not the faintest indication of a storm could be seen. The waters were as calm as a mill-pond, and the sky without a cloud.

One of the steaks from the shark was served for the captain’s table, and Miss Dunham made merry over the first officer’s belief that the death of the fish must be avenged ; but neither she nor Ben considered the meat as anything of a luxury. There was too much in the way of fresh provisions on board yet for them to turn to shark’s flesh as a delicacy, and when the breakfast was concluded and old Eliphilet began to clear away the dishes, the young girl said, laughingly :

“We have left the fish for you, uncle. It did n’t seem right for us to eat too much while you are so fond of it.”

“Bress de Lawd, honey, yer old uncle wouldn’t tech that stuff more’n he’d hang hisself on de jib-boom.”

“Don’t you think it is wholesome?”

“Wholesome, chile? Can what’s been fed on dead men be good fur to eat? I’se a gwine to go hungry a mighty long spell ’fore any ob dat stuff goes down my froat.”

Then the old darkey toddled away to the galley with his arms full of dishes, and Ben, too anxious regarding the safety of his vessel, even though no danger threatened, to remain long in one place, went on deck.

It was not necessary for Mr. Bean to wait many hours before he was able to say “I told you so” in regard to the weather.

By ten o’clock in the forenoon the breeze had sprung up from the west, and the brig was again in motion; but rolling uneasily in the swell from the southwest, which increased much more rapidly than did the wind.

By the time he was putting the finishing touches to the food for dinner, old Eliphilet had quite as much as he could do to keep the pots and pans on the stove, and Ben, alarmed by this singular combination of a heavy swell and a light wind, consulted the barometer.

“It is falling,” Miss Dunham said, as she noted his occupation, “and it seems as if Mr. Bean’s prediction was to prove true, in this case at least. I cannot understand, though, why the brig should pitch so terribly with nothing more than a fair sailing breeze.”

“We are probably getting the tail end of a hurricane,”

Ben replied, and then he hastened on deck to see that the vessel was snugged down for what he knew must be coming.

When the noonday meal was served the wind had increased until it was necessary to call all hands to aid in shortening sail, and no one thought of eating dinner at such a time.

At three o'clock the wind ceased almost entirely, and heavy banks of black clouds rolled up until the gloom was like that of twilight.

"It's coming now, and from a different quarter," Mr. Bean muttered to himself as he listened for the captain's commands.

Ben remained silent and motionless, understanding that he was powerless at this moment, for everything possible had been done to prepare the little craft for the fury of the gale, and in which direction to look for the threatened danger no one could tell.

One, two, three minutes of anxious suspense, and then the wind, which had been westerly, burst from the east with terrible fury, striking the brig dead ahead, catching all the sails aback, and bringing her up with a shock as if she had struck a reef.

During what to the anxious ones seemed like many moments, the spars bent and groaned under the enormous pressure as if about to be splintered into fragments; both Ben and the first officer sprang to assist the man at the helm in swinging the wheel hard over, and the brig began slowly to obey the rudder.

The enormous squares of canvas flapped and shivered with reports like the crackle of musketry, and then, with one thunderous reverberation, they filled again, and the brig gathered headway each instant until she was leaping over the foam-crested waves like a thing of life.

Bounding madly onward into the gloom which could not be pierced by the vision, the little ship, now tossed high on the summits of the foam-crested waves, and again plunged into the yawning chasms of water, dashed on, her crew powerless to do anything save keep her dead before the angry blast which might not lose its fury until she was amid the cluster of islands to the southward of Formosa.

The two hours which followed were for Ben full of anxiety and forebodings of evil.

Was this, his first command, to be ended so shortly by the tempest's blast?

Then the dense mass of clouds thinned away until the light of the sun could be faintly seen.

The shrieking wind subsided almost as suddenly as it had come, leaving in its stead the gentlest of summer breezes, and nothing remained of the tempest save the driven, leaping water which had literally been lashed into foam.

“It was short and sweet,” Ben said, with a sigh of relief as he gave the order to put the ship on her course once more, “and it 'll take a good twenty-four hours to regain the ground we have lost by this smother.”

“It 's a pity sailors could n't have the privilege of order-

ing the direction of the wind when they kill a shark," Mr. Bean said, thoughtfully; "but if men will do such things they must take the consequences."

Ben laughed, as he could well afford to do, now that the danger was over.

"Do you still hold to it, Mr. Bean, that all this came of catching the man-eater?"

"It is as true as that you are standing here," and then, as if unwilling to enter into any discussion on the matter, the first officer went forward to get the brig into proper trim once more.

Miss Dunham ventured on deck, and Ben, feeling he had earned the right to give himself a few moments freedom from care in the young girl's society, joined her at the companionway.

"Mr. Bean may say what he chooses about the danger of killing a shark; but I don't believe it, even if it did come true in this case," she said, laughingly, as Ben approached. "I've seen a good many caught, but never did a tempest descend upon the murderers so quickly."

"It is all nonsense, of course; but every man Jack of the crew, from this time out, will swear that it is a fact. It 'll be hard work to persuade either of them ever to throw a baited hook at a shark again."

"Well, now that we have paid the penalty for such dangerous sport, and are well out of the trouble, suppose we talk about yourself a moment," said the young girl.

"If you can find anything in a forecastle hand lately come into the cabin, that will serve as conversation for

such a charming bit of a sailor as you are, why drive ahead. I think it must be a pretty poor subject, myself."

"Do you really mean that, or did you receive so much praise while at Hong Kong that you are hungering for more, and expect me to gratify your vanity?"

"If you are going to begin in that strain, perhaps it would be a good idea for me to see what I can do toward helping Mr. Bean crack on more sail," Ben replied, with a laugh, as he made a feint of turning away, but yet had no intention of bringing the conversation to such an abrupt conclusion.

"Of course that was n't it, at all; but you provoked the reply by saying disagreeable things regarding a young man whom I consider a very good friend of mine."

"If you 've started on that tack I shall be willing to stand here and listen to you all night, no matter what may come up in the way of sea dangers, for it makes me proud to have you speak of me as a friend."

"There is no occasion for pride in anything of that sort; it is *my* vanity which is flattered by such a state of affairs; but now you see we are getting yet further from what I intended to speak about."

"Put your helm hard down, then, and swing around to the true course."

"Ay, ay, sir, here it is: Do you remember that you entirely neglected to feed the captain of this brig to-day at noon?"

"Well, yes, it seems to me I have an indistinct recollection of something of that kind; but then, bless your

dear heart, it does n't make any difference. He 's been without his regular grub too often to kick at a little thing like that."

"There 's no necessity of his depriving himself any longer. I told Eliphilet to make a dinner of the supper, and it is now very nearly ready, therefore I want you to leave Mr. Bean in charge of the deck for once, and come below. If I 'm not *first* mate of this craft, I insist on being *chief* mate, and, as such, have some little right to dictate even to the captain."

"Bless your heart, you rank way above any one else aboard of this brig, and you must be obeyed, or it 'll be a case of mutiny."

"Then take very good care nothing of that kind happens, and send word to the steward that we are ready, after which you may come into the saloon with me."

"It would be a precious poor skipper who would n't allow himself to be bossed by such a chief mate, so I am entirely at your service until there 's a change in the weather," and Ben followed her into the saloon, thinking he was a remarkably fortunate chap in having such a passenger on board the first vessel he ever commanded.

"It has been nothing but a streak of luck for me ever since I met you, and I begin to think there are such beings as mascots."

"And you take me for yours?"

"I wish to heaven I could," Ben replied, fervently, and, not intending that construction to be put upon her words, the chief mate's cheeks grew very rosy.

CHAPTER X.

A WATERSPOUT.

DURING the six days which followed the very pleasant evening Ben spent in the cabin with Miss Dunham, he had little opportunity to talk with the young woman.

Continual squalls with rain, and, now and then, electrical disturbances, are reported in each entry in the log-book; therefore, as a matter of course, it was necessary the captain have an "eye out" to all that was going on.

Ben hardly left the deck during this time, even for his meals.

He did not carry his excess of caution as a captain to the extent of absolutely depriving himself of food, but he more often took a hurried lunch, while standing in the open door of the galley, than in the cabin, and when Miss Dunham came on deck one evening, having been forced to remain below a week because of the weather, she said, as Ben advanced to assist her up the companionway stairs to the lee of the house:

"It has been so long since I have seen you, captain, that it seems as if we should be introduced to each other."

"You ought not to make any such remark as that, for I flattered myself, during the last opportunity I had of

spending a pleasant evening in the cabin, that we were becoming fast friends."

"Still I am afraid if the weather had continued as bad, we should have been strangers to each other in a short time longer, regardless of how well we might previously have been acquainted. How many days is it since I was on deck, I wonder?"

"Just seven. I know very well, for I have kept strict account, and this is really the first hour it has been fit for a lady to come outside."

"The sea is n't running as high as I expected."

"No, the squalls have been frequent, but not of such duration as to kick up much of a bobbery with the water. There has been more rain than wind, if you remember."

"I don't think I ever experienced quite such a long spell of bad weather at sea, without a regular gale at the beginning or the close."

"And we shall have one yet. So much disturbance means something in the way of dirty weather, but this night is as fair as the veriest fresh-water sailor could ask for, so we'll take advantage of it without troubling ourselves about what may be going to happen."

"I hope, for your sake, it will remain fair until morning. I verily believe you have n't been in your room during the last week, except to get an instrument or a chart."

"Well, I have n't been there a great deal, that's a fact, and yet I've contrived to turn in about as often as was necessary, although not very long at a time."

"Are you getting things into shape where you can take

a proper amount of rest, and depend more upon your officers?"

"Oh, yes; they are both good fellows, and try hard to do their duty. What is more, they put up with my interfering better than I had any right to expect."

"What about the crew?"

"On that point I cannot speak so encouragingly. The majority of them are fairly good sailors; some are a trifle sulky, and we've got a couple of Manilamen who would make trouble if they could, I fancy. There's one of them, now, standing under the lee of the galley. Not a very pleasant looking chap, is he?"

"He certainly isn't. I never did like that kind of a person."

"Well, there are only two, so they can't kick up much of a bobbery here, if we keep our eyes open, and, fortunately, with the exceptions I have made, the rest of them are *A i* men; on the whole, I have no reason to complain. Bean is a perfect gentleman, and Rogers all one could expect."

Miss Dunham looked around the deck with the air of an experienced sailor, and, seeing nothing with which she could find fault, save the face of this one particular man, rather fancied the young captain was too ready to distrust certain of the crew because of his anxiety regarding the voyage.

"I never thought I should learn to distrust a sailor," she said, thoughtfully; "but since the crew deserted without any cause, except, possibly, the fear of being punished

when we should reach port, I have changed my mind in regard to them as a class. I now know they are not all gallant at heart."

"There are a good many who can't be counted upon under any circumstances; but take Jack as a lot, and there are less scoundrels to be found in his ranks than among the same number of men ashore."

"Don't let us continue the subject. It carries me back to matters which had better not be thought of when everything around looks so peaceful. How luminous the sea is," she added, as a means of changing the topic of conversation."

"I've noticed for the last three or four nights that the water has been particularly bright, even during a rain storm. Do you believe that glow is caused by insects?"

"I don't suppose any one absolutely knows, but the best theory I have heard is that the luminous substance is something which is thrown off as a secretion supplied by the glands of the animalcula, although a few naturalists insist that it is caused by fatty degenerations in the tiny forms of life, the decomposed fat being the cause of the phosphorescence."

"I have often wondered whether it was n't something of the same nature as the composants, as the sailors call it, or St. Elmo's fire? We have had no less than three lights dancing around on the yard-arm at one time since this dirty spell came on. I fancied more than once that they dropped into the water, and on each occasion the phosphorescence appeared unusually luminous."

"But it is n't anything of that kind," Miss Dunham said, positively. "I remember how thoroughly frightened I was at the first composant I saw, and father insisted on my studying the subject; consequently, I ought to be conversant with it, for I read of nothing else for a week."

"Well, what did you make them out to be?" Ben asked. "I've heard as many different versions as I have seen sailors."

"It is evidently of the same nature as the light caused by electricity, passing off from points connected with the electrical machine. You never see them unless the air is heavily charged with electricity. Sailors in the olden times believed that these balls of light on the spars of their vessels were signs that they had nothing to fear from the storm, and hailed their appearance with delight instead of terror, as some of the mariners do nowadays."

"Then you are quite certain they are no relation to phosphorescence?"

"Oh, that is beyond question. The sea is more often luminous in fair weather than foul, while St. Elmo's fire is never seen except when there is a storm gathering."

"I never took any stock in the superstitions of the sailors; but there is certainly something uncanny looking about those balls of light dancing back and forth without any apparent cause."

There was very little opportunity for extended conversation. Although the evening had promised so fair, while Miss Dunham was describing to Ben a form of phosphorescence she had once seen, which caused the

waves to appear the colour of milk, a squall came up almost without warning, and she was forced to seek shelter in the cabin again.

"It seems as if I had hardly gotten on deck," she said, when Ben helped her below. "I hope this weather will settle down into something pleasant soon, for it is disagreeable work remaining in the cabin alone, listening to the noises which come with every roll and plunge of the ship."

"It must be, and I wish I could stay with you; but, of course, you know my place is on deck."

"I don't ask for anything of that kind, captain. It would be sheer torture to you, if you were forced to remain below during heavy weather. I wasn't intending to complain; but simply exercising a woman's right to find fault at any or all times."

"You surely ought to be allowed to do that, you've been so patient," Ben replied, and then it was necessary to shut the companionway door, for the rain was descending in torrents.

The night which followed was what a sailor would call a "dirty one" in every sense of the word, and not till the steward announced that breakfast was served did the young captain have an opportunity of going below.

"I fancy you will come on deck to-day," Ben said, as Miss Dunham emerged from her room in obedience to Eliphilet's summons. "It is fair now, therefore you had better take advantage of the opportunity; besides, there is a three-masted schooner in sight, which we shall

likely speak about noon, and you 'll want to be on hand then."

"If I have the same good fortune I have had for the past week, it will begin to rain as soon as I show my nose outside," the young girl said, laughingly ; "but I 'm going just the same, and intend to remain, no matter how hard it storms."

"You must not take any chances. If the squalls come as lively as they did last night, I shall insist on your going below."

"And I have an idea that we have n't seen the last of them," Mr. Bean, who had just entered the saloon, added. "Things look altogether too smooth to suit me, and it will stand us in hand to keep our weather eyes lifting during every hour of this day."

Old Eliphilet, who had just brought some of the food, looked at the first officer in an injured way as he made this prediction.

The steward had certainly had a very hard time of it during the succession of squalls. More than once had he lost the greater portion of a meal while bringing it from the galley to the cabin, by reason of being overturned in crossing the deck, and he had just been congratulating himself that they would have a spell of fine weather, when he heard the mate's remark.

He did not venture upon any reply, for he had been at sea long enough to understand that, however familiarly the officers might treat him while in port, they would allow no more freedom on his part while under way than

they would from the sailors; therefore he remained silent, and Miss Dunham gave full rein to her mirth as she saw the old fellow return to the kitchen with the most woebegone expression of countenance.

After the morning meal had come to an end, Miss Dunham, with the young captain's assistance, made herself comfortable on deck in a lounging chair, and, during an hour or more, Ben allowed himself the great pleasure of engaging her in conversation, apparently giving up, for the first time since leaving port, all forebodings of the possible result of the voyage.

The vessel which had been spoken of was hardly more than a faint smudge upon the horizon when the young girl came on deck, and the wind was so light that not until after the captain had taken his observation at noon could she be distinctly seen with the naked eye.

Not nearly as majestic looking as a ship did the schooner appear as she bore down upon them with every inch of canvas spread; but sufficiently beautiful to excite the admiration of all hands.

She was so near at dinner-time that the meal was eaten hurriedly, and when the brig's company came on deck again the stranger was hardly more than two miles distant, her white sails gleaming against the deep blue of the sky like spheres of ivory, glistening white.

The wind had fined away until it was almost a perfect calm, and one was forced to gaze long and intently before being positive the stranger was making the slightest headway.

Singularly fine was the weather; wonderfully clear the sky; the air calm; the temperature in the vicinity of the *Progressive Age* noticeably high, when, suddenly, without the slightest warning, the sea between the brig and the schooner, and distant from the former perhaps a mile and a quarter, became agitated, boiling up from the surface as if forced by some submarine explosion. Then it leaped upward until the spectator could hardly decide whether the waves ascended, or a column had formed from the thin, white cloud, which suddenly descended, and one could not have counted more than five before a great pillar of swirling water started in a direct line toward the almost motionless schooner.

"A waterspout!" Ben shouted. "That craft is doomed!"

For the briefest interval of time he stood as if transfixed with horror, his hand unconsciously resting upon Miss Dunham's shoulder, where it had fallen when he attempted to direct her gaze toward the terrible but fascinating sight. Then the sailorly instinct within him was awakened, and he cried, hurriedly:

"Order the boats lowered away, Mr. Bean! Those poor fellows will need help from us mighty soon, unless something wonderful happens to prevent the catastrophe."

The young girl could not trust herself to speak. With dilated eyes, and lips parted before the quick breath which came in gasps, she watched the awful spectacle.

There was absolutely not a breath of wind.

Those on board the apparently doomed craft could do

nothing to avoid what appeared almost certain destruction, and the watchers from the brig saw that each man was standing like a statue, awaiting the fate which was evidently about to overtake him.

The time of suspense was short.

Before the brig's boats could be lowered, although the first officer gave the command as soon as he received it from the captain, the column of water struck the schooner well forward, apparently burying her beneath the waves, and, bursting into a flood of spray, hid all that section of the sea from view of the spectators.

“She's gone!” Ben exclaimed, and Miss Dunham clasped her hands in an agony of apprehension.

The words had hardly been spoken before the schooner bounded upward as if she were a living thing struggling to escape the clutches of some marine monster, and it seemed as if she literally shook herself to throw off the weight of water; but she was no longer the trim, jaunty craft of a few seconds previous.

She rolled and tumbled in the boiling sea, herself the centre of a circle half a mile in diameter, wherein the water foamed and tossed as in a whirlpool, with the fore-mast snapped off close to the deck, its gear bringing down in the fall the main-topmast, and carrying away the jib-boom.

The raffle of spars and rigging alongside were being thrown against the hull with such force that the resounding blows could be heard distinctly on board the brig, and the schooner's crew were seen frantically endeavouring to

clear away the wreckage before the timbers of the craft should be stove.

During all this time not a breath of air could be felt by those on board the *Progressive Age*, and yet the wind was circling around the wreck with a force so great as to cause the bellying canvas to give forth thunder-like notes, while it was being swayed first this way and then that.

“The boats are ready, sir,” Mr. Bean reported.

“Very well. Hold them alongside. It would be useless to make an attempt at boarding until that white squall passes off. I hardly think there is any necessity of our paying them a visit; but it seems neighbourly to enquire if we can lend a hand.”

“Are you going to leave the brig, captain?” Miss Dunham asked, anxiously.

“Not a bit of it. Mr. Bean will take charge of the boats,” and then, turning to the first officer, Ben added, “Six men will be enough for you. If they are in need of assistance, stand by, and send a couple of men back to report to me. If not, you may return at once, for I fancy we shall get wind enough now to satisfy all hands.”

Five minutes later the long-boat and the captain’s gig were being rowed swiftly across the intervening space of water, and Ben and the young woman saw the first officer as he arose to hail when approaching the schooner.

Then came a short delay, during which he was evidently in conversation with the captain of the craft, who was talking with him from the quarter-deck, and, shortly after, both boats were headed for the brig.

"I am glad Bean was n't needed," Ben said, half to himself. "There's no telling how soon we shall get the wind again, or from what quarter it may come, and I should have felt mighty uncomfortable if he had gone aboard for five or six hours' work."

"Will they be able to repair the damage so as to get into port?" Miss Dunham asked, for the schooner looked to be thoroughly a wreck, even though the injury received was by no means as great as might have been expected.

"Yes, indeed ; that is n't much of a job with a full crew. They 'll soon be able to get head sails on to her, and work up toward port in pretty good shape, unless they strike heavy weather. The captain of that craft will never come as near death again without meeting it, as he did when the waterspout headed straight for him."

"I thought the schooner and all on board were doomed," Miss Dunham said, with a shudder.

"And I reckon they were of the same opinion. It had an ugly look for a few moments. Well, Mr. Bean?" he added, as the boats came alongside.

"The schooner *Shooting Star*, Captain Hardy, from Australia for Hong Kong, sixty-one days out. His compliments, and he thanks you for offering assistance, but he has crew enough to patch the hooker up into decent shape. There's a spare spar aboard that he 'll rig forward, and counts on the weather holding as it is for six or eight hours at the least."

"Very well, come aboard, sir, and you may get the light

canvas in. It won't do any harm if we are snugged down a bit to meet whatever is coming."

It looked odd to see the crew shortening sail in a dead calm; but it was a precaution almost any captain would have taken, and Ben watched the men at their work until, in his opinion, the little brig was ready to meet any vagary of weather which might arise.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TYPHOON.

BEFORE nightfall the scene had changed very decidedly.

The calm was succeeded by a dismal downpour of rain which brought with it only so much wind as would enable the brig to keep steerage way on and ceased entirely for half an hour at the close of the day when the appearance of the sun attracted the attention of every one.

It hung in the green clouds like a ball of fire, presenting a most singular and awesome appearance.

The waves increased in violence until they were running mountains high, and Mr. Bean said to the young captain, as the latter came out of the cabin after a hurried examination of the barometer :

“That waterspout was the sign of something worse to come, sir.”

“I can’t say whether it was a sign or not, but we are surely going to get all we need in the way of weather for a while,” Ben replied, looking very serious. “The barometer is falling steadily, and I never saw the clouds green but once before; that was when we laid in the

thick of a typhoon for twenty-four hours, in the *Enoch Train.*"

"Well, we are in good condition for whatever may happen," the first officer said, cheerily.

"So far as the brig is concerned, that's a fact; but we're getting well down toward the straits, and I would prefer to have more sea room."

Miss Dunham came on deck again wrapped in a mackintosh, evidently determined to remain as long as possible, regardless of the rain, and interrupted the conversation by asking:

"How will it fare with the *Shooting Star* if we have a heavy tempest?"

"What makes you think we need expect anything of the kind?"

"Your face would tell the story if there was nothing more; but don't you fancy I can read the barometer and see the angry appearance of the clouds and the ocean?"

"That was rather a foolish question of mine, I'll admit, and I am afraid it will be impossible to answer yours. The schooner is in a bad way to meet heavy weather; but if, as I fancy, we are going to have a typhoon, he'll have a chance to work himself well up toward port, for they generally give forty-eight hours' notice of their coming."

"I reckon we shall catch it sooner than that, sir," Mr. Bean suggested. "It ought to be here within twenty-four hours after the sea gets up in this way."

Ben was doing his best not to appear disturbed in mind

while the young lady was on deck; but in this he did not succeed very well.

Miss Dunham understood that he was anxious, as well he might be, and soon she was looking quite as troubled as either of the officers.

After remaining on deck an hour or more, Miss Dunham realised that it would be better for her to go below. Both Ben and the first officer were evidently ill at ease, but trying to repress their feelings in her presence, and assuming the cheeriest tone possible under the circumstances, she said, as Ben went toward the companionway, for the purpose of looking at the barometer again :

“I think I’ll go with you, captain, if you will help me down the stairs. Perhaps it is as well that I should be below out of the way.”

“It will be safer, at all events,” Ben said, not intending to allow the relief which he felt to be apparent in his tones. It is impossible to decide just when the storm will burst, and we shall probably have our hands full when it does come. I am selfish, however, in thinking only of myself, for I know how lonely it must be for you down here alone.”

“There is no reason why you should think of me at all. You have enough on your mind without anything like that. But give the little brig all the credit that is due her; I am positive she will ride out anything which may come, in safety, for I have seen her too many times in a storm to have any distrust of her sea-going qualities.”

“I do n’t trouble myself about that; in fact, there is

no particular reason why I should be disturbed, except, of course, that I am a green hand at playing captain, and, as you suggested yesterday, am apt to magnify trifles."

This was said with an ill-assumed air of gaiety, and after another look at the barometer, which was still falling, Ben bade the "chief mate" good night, as he ascended the companionway stairs.

During the entire night Ben remained on deck, watching the heavy masses of clouds which seemed to be breaking in every direction, and in her room, able to judge only from the movements of the vessel as to what might be going on, Miss Dunham kept her watch, fancying with each plunge of the little brig that the threatened storm had finally burst upon them.

Although so long anticipated, the typhoon came when it was least expected.

Two hours after sunrise the wind burst upon them in furious gusts, and instantly the buoyant craft was battling with the waves which oftentimes completely submerged her.

All hands, with the exception of Miss Dunham, were on deck clinging to the life-lines, unable to do other than keep the brig before the furious blast, and, even with four men at the helm, this was not an easy matter, for the furious waves, striking the rudder as the hull was uplifted, would break the grasp of the sailors, causing the wheel to swing completely around before it could be checked.

Every movable thing on deck was washed overboard before fifteen minutes had elapsed. One of the boats

was torn completely out of the davits and flung over the port rail like an egg-shell, and huge walls of water, rent and torn by the wind, enveloped the scene with an impenetrable veil, so that fully one-half of the time it was impossible for the captain on the quarter-deck to see as far forward as the galley.

To hold a conversation was out of the question, and, although standing close beside the captain, Mr. Bean vainly endeavoured to make his words heard.

Fortunately, there were no orders to be given. There was nothing that could be done, and, helpless, no matter what might happen, the young captain watched this battle of the elements, realising, more forcibly than ever before, how feeble is the strength of man when arrayed against the forces of nature.

During another hour, the brig laboured manfully to bear her crew on in safety, tossed like a cork upon the waters and shaking off the weight which threatened to carry her to the bottom, as she rose gallantly after each blow to meet the enemy. Then the wind ceased, suddenly, during a space of time while one might have counted five, and, with a yet more furious gust than before, it literally pressed the little craft beneath the waves.

At the same instant, there was a dull sound as of the rending of wood-work, reports like the discharge of cannon as the stays parted, and then the maintopgallant-mast was swept away like a straw, the foretopgallant-mast and jib-boom following almost as quickly as one can tell of the disaster.

It seemed as if, with this deadly peril, Ben lost all fear ; there was a foe now confronting him, against which he could fight.

The raffle of spars hanging over the port side was lifted by each succeeding wave, and hurled violently against the brig's hull, every shock causing her to tremble and groan, as if she had struck a reef.

No vessel ever built could withstand the violence of this conflict many moments, and remain uninjured. It was absolutely necessary the danger should be averted at once, or the voyage of the *Progressive Age* would be at an end before it had extended as far as the Straits of Sunda.

It was impossible for any word of command to be heard, but every man on deck knew exactly what should be done, and, as Ben made his way forward by the aid of the life-lines, all, save those at the wheel, clustered around him.

During the next two hours, the crew worked as men will for their lives, and, at the end of that time, the spars had drifted far astern, the violence of the tempest had subsided, and the little brig, so trim and jaunty a few hours before, now tossed on the storm-driven waters, apparently a helpless wreck.

As soon as the more imminent danger had been averted, Ben took sufficient time to run below in order to speak with the young girl.

He knew she must have heard the blows of the timbers upon the hull, and understood that she would fancy the

danger to be greater than it really was, while alone in the cabin, unable to get the slightest information as to what was going on outside.

He found her seated in one of the stationary chairs at the table, which was, in fact, about the only place where she could have remained many moments at a time, and, although she said not a word which gave a hint of her terror, the white face told, eloquently, of the fever of fear in her breast.

“The worst is over,” he said, reassuringly, as, hardly conscious of what he did, he took her hand in his. “The worst is over, and, in a few hours at the longest, the typhoon will have become one of the things of the past.”

“Did the brig strike a reef?” she asked, nervously, using every effort to prevent her voice from trembling.

“No; the blows you felt came from alongside. We carried away both topmasts, and have just succeeded in getting clear of them.”

“Are we in any danger?”

“Not the slightest, and I hope you will believe what I say, for at such a time it would be worse than criminal to deceive you. We are neither in danger, nor will the mishap delay us very long. We can handle the craft as she is until arriving at Anjer, where everything will be put into proper trim once more. You must be thoroughly worn out trying to hold yourself in this chair. Can’t I persuade you to go into your room and lie down?”

“Listen!” she replied, holding up one hand.

The brig had plunged into a chasm of the sea, and

every timber was sending forth a shrieking protest against the involuntary leap ; the howling of the wind through the rigging could be heard more plainly below than on deck, and there was such a confusion of terrifying noises as would have caused alarm in the boldest landsman.

There was no further need for her to explain to Ben why she could not go to her room, and, pressing her hand as if he would reassure her by his own courage, he said, hurriedly :

“ You know very well that I can’t remain here, but I will come back as often as possible. Trust to it that you shall learn instantly matters grow dangerous. I will keep you in ignorance of nothing. Until you see or hear from me again, understand that everything is going on with us as well as possible.”

Then Ben, not daring to stay away from the deck any longer, hurried out, and the work of getting the craft into proper sailing trim once more was continued.

The young captain had no idea of trying to repair the damage done by the typhoon, to any greater extent than that of “ patching up ” the brig sufficiently to admit of her being sailed to Anjer, where would be found every facility for refitting.

There was quite as much work as all hands could do during the forty-eight hours immediately following the tempest, and both the mates turned to with the men, understanding that Ben’s anxiety would continue to be almost overpowering until the little craft was once more in condition to battle with the elements.

During the greater portion of this time, it was absolutely necessary for Miss Dunham to remain in the cabin, owing to the heavy sea running, which rendered it a matter of great difficulty to make one's way across the decks.

Ben visited her often, but did not stay below many moments at a time.

She understood full well how concerned he was regarding the repairs, and insisted that he should not give her a thought until matters were in better shape.

"I shall get along very well," she said cheerily, "and my loneliness is no harder to bear than your anxiety. Do not think it is necessary to come here every few moments."

"It is almost brutal to leave you alone in the midst of these nerve-racking noises," Ben replied, as the timbers gave forth an unusually loud protest against the blows of the waves. "The moment it is safe to venture on deck I will attend to it that you are in a position to see what is going on."

"Don't pay any attention to me," she repeated, bravely, and this putting aside of her own troubles in order to ease his mind caused Ben to reproach himself more severely than before at leaving her alone so long.

Twenty-four hours later the young girl was snugly ensconced in a sea-chair to leeward of the house on the quarter-deck, and there she remained the greater portion of the hours of daylight until the anchors were down once more.

It was on the second day after this that the brig

arrived off Anjer, a seaport town of the Dutch East Indian island of Java, situated in the Straits of Sunda, eighteen miles west of Batavia.

Here a week was spent putting the brig into proper trim, and during this time Ben took occasion to overhaul the supply of water, the stowing of which he had entrusted to one of the ship-keepers on the day he went from Macao to Hong Kong.

It was found that less than half the casks were filled, and the second mate was sent ashore with a party to take aboard such a quantity as he considered necessary for the voyage.

This work was concluded on the same day the brig was ready for sea once more, and, as a matter of necessity, the water was stowed on deck.

The entry on the log-book Thursday, November 22d, reads as follows:

"1 A. M. Got under way, and commenced working down the Straits in company with ships *Tarolinta* and *Star King* of New York, also an English ship and bark. Light, variable airs and squalls."

In the remainder of the entries up to the 11th day of March there is nothing of especial interest to recall.

The little brig was traversing the oceans as rapidly as could be expected, and matters progressed to the entire satisfaction of the young captain, who was now growing accustomed to the responsibilities of his position, therefore, as a natural consequence, less inclined to worry about trifles.

As a matter of course he and Miss Dunham had grown to be fast friends, thrown so constantly in one another's company, and with almost identical interests, for the young girl was as eager the brig should be brought safely into port at the conclusion of her father's last voyage as Ben was to make a successful record on his first command.

The next entry in the log-book which has any especial interest, and from which dates the most serious trouble Ben ever had, or has since known, is as follows :

“TUESDAY, December 11th.

“This day commenced like the preceding: A dead calm and a heavy sea, with the brig tumbling about badly. 3 P. M. Two of our largest water-casks burst, and we lost about three hundred gallons of water. Lat. 25. 54 S. Long. 64. 34 E.”

From this time until the Cape of Good Hope was reached, the record consists almost wholly of accounts of heavy weather, and on New Year's day, after an unusually elaborate dinner had been served both forward and aft, old Eliphilet asked for permission to speak with the captain.

It was the second mate who brought the word to the quarter-deck, and Ben, fancying the steward was about to act as spokesman for the crew in proffering a request for a half-holiday, went to the galley fully decided to grant any favour which might be asked.

One look at the old darkey's face was sufficient to convince him, even before anything had been said, that something serious was on Eliphilet's mind, for he very

ceremoniously beckoned the young captain to enter, and then closed the door immediately, as if afraid of being seen by some one of the crew.

“What’s the matter, uncle. Haven’t been finding any more ghosts around the brig, have you?”

“It was n’ dat, sah, it was n’ dat. I done sen’ fur to arsk youse to cum hyar, kase I don’ hol’ to it de mates oughter know what I’se gwine fo’ to tell you.”

“Well, cut it short, uncle, let’s hear the trouble at once.”

“It am de water, sah.”

“The water!” Ben cried, now beginning to grow alarmed. “What’s the trouble with that?”

“Dare ain’ ‘nough ob it ter trubble much ‘bout, sah. Dem gallons wha’ didn’t git busted in de cask hab done gone leaked away till dere ain’ more’n hun’red an’ fifty lef’.”

“What?” and Ben’s face grew pale.

“It am de solum trufe, sah, I’se jes bin habin’ er’vestigation ob it myself, sah, dis yere mawnin. Fust off I was gwine to cum straight to you, sah, an’ den it popped inter my min’ dat ef de crew shoul’ see de captin foolin’ wid de casks, dey mought get skeery like.”

“You are right, uncle. Not one of them must know anything about it. There’d be the very mischief to pay if they thought there was danger of going on short allowance.”

“But dey knows it now, sah, leastways, two ob ‘em does. Dey was foolin’ ‘roun’ an’ dat’s what set me to sperimentin’.”

“Fooling around! Who were?” Ben asked.

"Dem yeller ones wha' you call Manilermen, an' I lays dey's 'bout de same as de pirates wha' tried to cum aboard, but could n't."

"The Manilamen fooling around the casks, eh?" Ben said, half to himself, and then added in a louder tone: "Did you see what they were doing?"

"No, sah. Fust off I 'lowed dey was layin' dere sojerin, an' den it kinder struck me all in a heap dat dey mought be wastin' ob it, so 'bout dinner time I made de 'vestigation, an' its trufe I'se tellin' ob you, sah, dere ain't more 'n er hun'red an' fifty gallons."

"Keep this thing to yourself, Eliphilet, until I decide what is to be done. There won't be any harm if you have an eye out on those Manilamen. Don't go to following them around, of course, but just make it your business to see what they do while on deck, and there must be no report made to me in the cabin where Miss Dunham might hear you."

"Dere's no danger ob dat, sah. De missy nebber's gwine to git it frum me dat dere's any wrong goin'."

"But there is n't, uncle," and now Ben realized that it was quite as necessary to allay the fears of the steward, as to prevent the men from understanding the true condition of affairs. "We shall run in for water, of course, as soon as possible, and it will only result in our being delayed a little, that's all."

"It's gwine to be a mighty quick run we'se boun' to make, sah, 'less we goes on short 'lowance," Eliphilet replied, gravely.

"Now don't get scary, uncle. Be as economical as you can; I'll see that the cabin allowance is n't wasted, and, before there can be any necessity of depriving the sailors of all they may want, we shall have a fresh supply on board. Remember, not a word of this to anybody."

Then Ben walked slowly aft with sufficient on his mind to have caused a much older man the gravest apprehension and alarm, for a short allowance of water meant more suffering, possibly more danger, than a scarcity of provisions could ever have done.

CHAPTER XII.

ON SHORT ALLOWANCE.

BEN'S face showed his uneasiness of mind quite as plainly as had the steward's, as he went aft and fell to pacing to and fro nervously on the quarter-deck.

As a matter of course neither of his officers ventured to ask for any explanation ; but after he had continued his aimless walk for an hour or more, the cloud on his face growing darker each moment, Miss Dunham came on deck.

Fearful of divulging his secret if he should allow himself to enter into conversation with her, he started below, as if going to his own room for a nap ; but before he could accomplish this purpose she called to him.

If Ben had not known the young lady intimately he might have taken the chances his secret would not be discovered, and entered into conversation without hesitation ; but he had been acquainted with her sufficiently long to understand she would learn sooner or later what was troubling him, unless he was willing to keep her in suspense by refusing to make any explanation.

Therefore he said as he joined her :

“ If you want to have any talk with me, suppose we go below ? ”

“That is exactly what I wish,” she replied, and, when the two were in the saloon, Ben asked :

“Is there anything in particular which you want to say to me?”

“If you do not know already, why did you ask me to come below, instead of waiting on deck?”

“I thought we should be less likely to be disturbed down here.”

“Yes,” she replied, gravely, “and you were also afraid something might be overheard. I want to know what trouble you have on your mind. You have shown that it is a very serious one, by not being willing to speak of it where either of the officers might hear you.”

“That’s where you are making a mistake, I think,” Ben replied, doing his best to speak in a jovial tone ; but failing most signally. “Of course there are many things to trouble a fellow aboard ship, and this is one which I would very much prefer to keep to myself, more especially since there is really no reason why any one else should know it.”

“But you promised I should be informed of everything that happened, captain,” she said, laying her hand lightly on his arm as if she knew it was a gesture, trifling in itself, which he could not resist.

“I suppose I shall have to tell you,” he said, as if vexed with himself for yielding so readily ; “but it really seems too bad that you should insist on learning things which may cause annoyance, and cannot be avoided.”

“It is right I should know, since I am the chief mate,”

she replied, with a look which disarmed Ben entirely, and, without further hesitation, he repeated to her what old Eliphilet told him.

“And is such a matter nothing more than annoying to you?” she asked, gravely. “Do you fancy I cannot understand what the lack of water may mean?”

“But, really, it will be nothing more serious than our having to go on short allowance for a while, and the chief trouble is, that we shall be forced to put into St. Helena, in order to replenish the supply.”

“Will that mean much detention?”

“It should not be more than a couple of days at the outside.”

“And you were looking troubled about that?”

“Yes,” Ben replied, hesitatingly.

“And why don’t you also say that it causes you considerable woriment because the Manilamen were seen in the vicinity of the casks?”

“Do you think there is anything suspicious in that?” Ben asked, quickly.

“Don’t you?”

“I hardly know what to make of it; but we shall have an opportunity of finding out if there is any idea of mischief, for the old darkey can keep his eyes on the men without being suspected of watching.”

“Then you already had suspicions strong enough to suggest such a thing to him?”

“I thought it would be a good idea to know if there was anything going on, and I ordered him to report to me

without your knowledge, for I didn't intend you should be annoyed with anything of the kind. Now, however, since you know all about it, it would n't be a bad idea for him to tell you all he may learn, instead of me, and the next time you see him alone you had better explain it to him."

The fact that Miss Dunham had shown no fear at the news caused Ben to feel that perhaps he had done right in making her acquainted with the exact state of affairs. It certainly was a relief to share his secret with some one, and much better she should be his confidant than either of the mates.

"The men will understand that you intend to make land, as soon as the course is changed."

"It will not be necessary to haul around any. We are laying as near for the island now as if we had intended to touch there from the time of leaving the cape. Since you have learned what you wanted to know, and I should go on deck, suppose you come above once more?"

"I am perfectly willing to do that if you will try to get rid of the troubled expression which is on your face. Any one can see something serious is occupying your thoughts, and if you intend to keep the officers in ignorance of the true state of affairs, it would be a good idea to look more cheerful."

"I certainly ought to be able to go as far in that line as you," Ben replied, with a glance of admiration. "It does a fellow good to meet a young woman who can look at the sensible end of things, and I'm a great baby if I can't brace up after the example you've set me."

"Well, so far as compliments are concerned, captain, I am greatly obliged to you; but the flattery I don't care so much about."

"It wasn't flattery at all; but downright truth, and I meant every word."

"Then come on deck, and profit by my example," she replied, with a merry laugh, hurrying up the companion-way stairs, as if fearing the young captain was about to say something more personal.

"I don't wonder her father took her to sea with him," Ben said to himself, as he stood watching the young woman an instant. "A bit of a girl like her puts a deal of romance into a ship, and, if it wasn't for being forced to meet the owners, I'd be willing to have this voyage continue indefinitely."

Ben was feeling very much better when he followed Miss Dunham on deck, and the two mates, who had decided between themselves that there was something "wrong with the old man," came to the conclusion they must have made a mistake, for he was in as good spirits as before the steward revealed the true state of affairs.

Not again during that day did Miss Dunham and Ben have an opportunity for a private conversation; but on the following morning, at the breakfast-table, she gave him to understand, by a mysterious knitting of the brow whenever he looked in her direction, that she wished to speak with him.

Mr. Bean was eating breakfast, and Mr. Rogers would come below as soon as the first officer had concluded,

consequently, some time must elapse before he could talk with her privately in the cabin, therefore, he said, with a careless air, as he arose from the table:

“The weather is fine this morning, and it has been such a rarity during this voyage that you had better take advantage of it by coming on deck for a promenade with me. I feel like walking just now.”

She accepted the proposition at once, as a matter of course, and, a few moments later, was clinging to his arm as they paced to and fro on the quarter-deck, waiting until they should be beyond hearing of the helmsman before broaching the important subject.

“Speak of what you have in your mind only while we are at this end of the deck, and be talking on some commonplace subject when we approach the man at the wheel,” Ben said. “Now tell me what you have heard?”

“Old Eliphilet whispered to me this morning, while he was preparing the breakfast-table, that last night in the port watch the Manilamen took two of the sailors over near the casks, and were evidently explaining to them the fact that the supply of water was low.”

She was forced to stop a moment as they reached the helmsman, and then continued:

“He says there can be no mistake about their purpose, for at the conclusion of the conversation one of the white men sounded the empty casks.”

“In that case our secret is a secret no longer, for every man Jack of them knows it by this time. I ought to have put those yellow scoundrels in irons without waiting

for a pretext, and kept them between decks, when Eliph-alet first told me what he had seen. The mischief is done now, however, and I may as well tell Bean myself, for he will be sure to hear it from the men."

There was another pause in the conversation as they drew near the helmsman once more, and then Miss Dunham replied :

"Don't you think it would be better, since we are certain the fact is known to some of them, that the men themselves learn it from you?"

"Would you have me go into the forecastle and make an explanation to my crew?" Ben asked, quite sharply.

"No, indeed, there's no necessity of that; but if you should put them on short allowance, as must soon be done, no further explanations would be required."

"That is what I ought to have done yesterday. It seems as if I was no longer capable of deciding upon the proper course of action; but then, you are to blame for that change in me."

"How?" the young girl asked, curiously, looking up into his face quickly, and he answered, with a glance which caused her eyes to droop and her cheeks to flush ever so little :

"Because you have been such an efficient and charming chief mate that I have learned to depend upon you very much."

Before she could make any reply to this remark, which certainly savoured of flattery, Mr. Bean came on deck, and Ben beckoned for him to approach.

"The steward reports that the supply of water is very low, sir," the young captain said, when the first officer was near him. "We will allowance all hands, in the cabin as well as forecastle, to one quart per day."

"Very well, I will attend to it," Bean replied, promptly, and then asked, hesitatingly, "May I inquire how low the supply is, sir?"

"The steward reports only an hundred and fifty gallons. I cannot fancy how it decreased so suddenly; but you had better take good care that what is left cannot be gotten at by the crew."

Mr. Bean looked considerably puzzled, started to move away, and then stepped back as if anxious to say something; but evidently thought better of it, for he turned again immediately to carry out the captain's orders, and Miss Dunham said, in a low tone:

"He has seen something suspicious in the movements of the crew, I am positive, and has been deliberating whether he should tell you or not."

"I reckon it'll come out if he's got anything in his noddle. It is his duty to report the first show of dissatisfaction or suspicious conduct on the part of the men, instantly he sees it; therefore I prefer not to question him."

Two of the sailors were standing near the galley when Mr. Bean announced to the steward the captain's orders relative to putting all hands on a short allowance of water, and in less than five minutes such of the men as were on deck could be seen conversing in couples here

and there, as the opportunity offered, some evidently treating the matter as a not uncommon episode on ship-board, while others appeared highly dissatisfied.

The Manilamen were particularly talkative at this time, and Miss Dunham, observing their movements, said, in a half whisper :

“I always think of snakes whenever I see any of that race of people, and am beginning to feel afraid more will come of this thing than simply inconvenience.”

“Now, don’t fret your little head about them,” Ben said, half seriously. “There won’t be any attempt at playing mutiny, unless, perhaps, those yellow scoundrels should try to influence some of the others; but I’ll answer for the white members of this crew.”

Miss Dunham did not appear convinced that there was no danger to be apprehended; but she forbore making any remarks on the subject, and, a few moments later, went into the cabin.

As she disappeared, Mr. Bean approached the captain.

“I was waiting for her to go, sir,” he said, “because she has had trouble enough in her short life, without our causing her anxiety which may be needless.”

“What do you mean?”

“Does it strike you that the men are acting rather oddly in regard to the matter of putting them on short allowance?”

“I hadn’t noticed anything, except it might be in regard to the Manilamen. They are dancing around like peas in a popper.”

"And have been doing a deal of that sort of work before this, sir. I've had my eye on them for two or three days ; but there was absolutely nothing to report, so held my tongue. Now, however, I think it would be a good idea if we kept them well in sight."

"I should have suggested that to you, if you had n't spoken first," and then Ben told him of Eliphilet's report, concluding with the remark, "I don't really anticipate any trouble ; but, under the circumstances, I think it best to be too cautious rather than too careless in regard to them. The steward will be more likely to find out if anything is going wrong than we shall, and will report it at once to Miss Dunham."

"Then she knows all the facts of the case ?" Mr. Bean asked, and Ben had a very strong impression that the mate was questioning in his own mind whether the captain of the brig should not have confided in his officers before taking counsel with a young lady, however charming she might be.

"Yes, I was literally forced to tell her. Old Eliphilet's report troubled me not a little, and she pinned me right down to know what was the matter ; so I thought the truth would answer best in that case."

"May I ask when you first learned of the disappearance of the water, sir ?"

"Yesterday."

Again the mate looked as if he thought he ought to have heard of the matter before ; but said nothing, and Ben asked :

"What did you see that attracted your attention to those yellow fellows?"

"It was n't anything really definable, sir. I noticed they talked with first one of the men and then another privately, and were so careful to stop the conversation instantly I came near, that I resolved they would bear watching."

"Do you think they had any part in the disappearance of the water?"

"I would give them credit for a willingness to do almost anything; but can't understand how they could be benefited by being put on short allowance."

The crew were taking notice of the fact that the captain and his mate were indulging in rather a long conversation, and, under the circumstances, it was better there should be no opportunity for them to suspect the facts of the case were worse than had been stated, as Ben suggested.

"I think we had better separate, sir. The crew may fancy there is something more in the wind than a short allowance of water, if we talk too earnestly together. In case there is any mischief on foot, the slightest false move on our part would complicate matters."

Mr. Bean acted upon the suggestion at once, and, it being his watch below, retired to his room, leaving Ben decidedly more uncomfortable in mind than he had been since Eliphilet spoke to him.

It was not that the scarcity of water troubled him so greatly, for the casks could readily be filled at St. Helena;

and neither crew nor officers would suffer any serious inconvenience, since that island could be made, under ordinary circumstances, before the supply was entirely exhausted.

Ben knew what it was to be on a short allowance of this precious liquid, and he also knew that, as a rule, sailors were not given to murmuring when such a condition of affairs was made known, more especially if it could be attributed to an accident, as in this case; but he felt very certain the bursting of the two casks would not in itself have so seriously reduced the supply.

There had been mischief done by some member of the crew, and this was sufficient to cause the young captain the gravest apprehensions.

The days passed without any open show of mutiny or discontent.

The men performed their duties promptly, but not cheerfully, as had been their custom, and all the officers noted the hurried chats which were indulged in during any idle moments on deck.

At least three times each day old Eliphilet had an opportunity, while making ready the meals in the cabin, to speak with Miss Dunham; but he had nothing of importance to communicate.

He kept his eyes and ears open without hearing or seeing anything in particular, save that, in his mind, the Manilamen appeared more bold, and seemed to have gotten the greater portion of the crew under their control.

All this might have been his fancy, however, and so

Ben said to Miss Dunham when she related the conversations; but even while treating the matter as of no very great importance, he was decidedly more anxious than he would have been willing she should know.

On the 10th of January the trade-winds were strong, with St. Helena bearing N. E. by N. 42 miles distant, when the brig was hauled around for the island.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when the course was changed, and there could be no question but that the mutinous members of the crew were perfectly satisfied in the belief that they were soon to come to an anchor.

"Those yellow scoundrels have got something in their heads which causes them to want to go ashore," Mr. Bean said, as he and the young captain were pacing the quarter-deck with their "weather eyes lifting," for the wind was increasing, and the clouds beginning to look decidedly "nasty."

"The only purpose for which they'd want to put into St. Helena would be to desert, and I cannot make out how that could help them any," Ben said, half to himself. "It would be a case of losing the wages due, and the island is n't such a desirable place that men are usually willing to risk the punishment of deserting their ship for the sake of getting ashore."

"Well, there's something of that kind in the wind, without any question. I believe the Manilamen wasted the water, and the only reason for doing that would be to force us to put into a port," Mr. Bean replied.

"It would be a good idea to have your wits about you,

when we come to an anchor, and see that no one goes ashore except those whom we feel positive can be trusted," Ben said, and then a gradual change of the weather put an end to the conversation. "Better furl the topgallant sails, flying jib and mainsail, and single reef the topsail," he added, a few seconds later. "If this weather continues as it threatens, it will be best to give St. Helena the go-by, and bear up for Ascension. I don't want to spend too much time around here."

From that moment until nearly morning there was no opportunity for the members of the crew to hatch any mischief among themselves, for all hands were kept steadily at work.

By midnight the wind was blowing considerably more than half a gale, and the sea was remarkably heavy.

At three o'clock in the morning there were signs that the wind would soon fine down to a fair sailing breeze, and Ben turned in.

Two hours later the first officer knocked at the door of his room.

"I set the mainsail an hour ago, sir," Mr. Bean said, when he had been told to enter, "and we have just made land bearing south, fifteen miles dead to windward. Do you think it best to attempt to work in, sir?"

Instead of deciding the question then and there, Ben arose, put on his boots and coat, for he had turned in "all standing," and went on deck.

The crew were watching the movements of the officers very intently, for they had not lost sight of the fact that

Mr. Bean went below immediately land was sighted, and all understood what a long task it might be to work up to an anchorage.

"They are anxious to know what we are about to do," Mr. Bean suggested, as Ben's eyes involuntarily went toward his men.

"They shall soon be satisfied," the young captain replied quickly, "and so much the worse if it does n't please them." Then he added, in a louder tone, "You may fill away, Mr. Bean. Set the course nor', nor'west, and crack on all sail."

A moment later the mate began issuing the necessary commands, and there could no longer be any question but that the mutinously inclined members of the crew were not only disappointed, but thoroughly angry because the original intention had not been carried out.

"If we are going to have any trouble it 'll come mighty soon, now," Ben said to himself, as he began pacing the quarter-deck, watching for the signs of that storm of human passion which he had good reason to believe would soon break upon them.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DEMAND.

IT was not necessary Ben should remain in suspense very long as to the true feeling of his crew.

At seven o'clock the studdingsails were set, and when this work had been performed in an unusually slow and shiftless manner, one of the crew, he who had shipped as "Jolly Bart," came slouching aft, with all the members of both watches at his heels.

"What is the meaning of this?" Mr. Bean asked, before they were abaft the mainmast.

"We want to speak to the captain, sir," was the reply, in a surly tone.

"Why don't you wait to ask permission?"

"Well, because in the first place it would take too much time. Then, agin, he 's got nothin' else to do, an' I reckon he can hear what we want to say."

As a matter of course Ben could distinguish every word, standing only a few paces away as he was, and, stepping forward to the break of the quarter, he asked, sharply :

"Well, what is it you want?"

"We 've come aft, sir, to find out if you 've made up your mind not to put into St. Helena?"

"If you are a sailor you know very well we are standing on our true course again."

"That's what I made it, sir, but me an' my mates here think it ain't treatin' us right, seein' as we're on a short allowance of water, to keep off when we're so nigh a port. There's no knowin' what may happen aboard a vessel in the shape this craft is."

"Now look here," Ben replied, quickly, advancing a pace or two to show he was ready to face them all. "There is no reason why I should make any explanation to you in regard to what is being done, yet I am willing to do so. It is my business to navigate this brig the best I know how, for the safety of all, and the owners also expect that we won't soldier around any more than is absolutely necessary. You are not on such short allowance as I fancy every one of you have been many times before this, and we can make Ascension in four or five days without cutting the allowance any lower than it is now. There is no danger of suffering, and that you should know very well, since the young lady and the officers are in the same box with you."

"But there's no tellin' whether we'll be able to make Ascension. If the weather holds as we've had it since leavin' the Straits, who can tell how the bloomin' voyage is going to turn out?"

"It is enough for you to know that I am not asking the crew to take any more chances than I'm willing to take," Ben said, turning at this instant, as Miss Dunham's hand was laid lightly on his arm. Then he added to her in a

low tone, "This is no place for you; The men are turning a bit rusty as we expected, and now, if ever, is the time to put them where they belong. Go below, and I will see you when this interview is ended."

"Please let me stay," she said, imploringly. "You promised I should know what was going on, and now, if ever, is the time for me to be here."

Ben made no further remonstrance, and, taking her by the hand, faced the men once more as he said, sternly:

"You are a fine crowd to call yourselves sailors, are n't you? A crowd to be proud of, standing up here and whining like curs, when this young girl is in the same box with us all, and has n't so much as murmured because she was put on an allowance of a quart of water per day."

"It's all very well for them as lives aft an' can have what they want, but Jack in the forecastle has to take what he can get. Besides, she has n't been to sea long enough to know the meanin' of sich things."

"She's a better sailor to-day than you are, and probably has seen as much life aboard ship as any of your cowardly crowd. Now go forward, and if I hear another word of complaint out of your heads, there'll be trouble for all hands. I've got more at stake in this venture than the whole of you put together, and am not taking any chances. There is no captain in the world who would not do exactly as I have done in regard to putting into St. Helena. You and I have rubbed along very well so far on this voyage, but don't make the mistake of

thinking I sha' n't be on hand if you turn rusty, for I know my duty, and shall do it."

Bart held his ground as if thinking the men were close by him, but a shuffle of footsteps as the captain, dropping Miss Dunham's hand, advanced threateningly, told that those who had been so ready to stand at his back a few moments previous were now deserting him.

Even the Manilamen concluded that it would be best to obey the captain's orders, on this occasion at least, and, without stopping to utter the words which were trembling on his lips, the spokesman of the party turned sulkily and slouched forward.

"Don't say anything to me now," Ben whispered to the young girl. "It won't do to let those fellows think we are disturbed in the slightest degree by what has been done; therefore, take your promenade as usual until breakfast is served, and be careful not to hold a conversation with either of the officers."

Miss Dunham knew thoroughly well what could be accomplished by a bold bearing under such circumstances, and obeyed Ben's orders, instantly, pacing to and fro upon the quarter-deck, with not a cloud on her face to show the disquietude in her mind.

"There's a woman for you!" Ben said, as he watched her, with admiration beaming from his eyes; "and if this voyage is ended successfully, it will be only for her to say whether she will continue to hold the position of chief mate over this skipper or not."

During the remainder of the day, nothing was seen to

cause the young captain any suspicion that his men were meditating mischief.

Acting upon his instructions, Miss Dunham had cautioned old Eliphilet to keep a sharper lookout than usual, but, when it came night, the steward had nothing of particular interest to impart.

“It’s jes’ like dey has done gone gib up hatchin’ mischief,” he said to the young girl, while he was laying the cabin table for supper. “I specs wha’ de cap’n done say dis mawnin’ did a power ob good, an’ dem yeller scoun’rels tink it won’t do to kick up er bobbery.”

“Have you seen them very often to-day?” Miss Dunham asked, referring to the Manilamen.

“Not sich a pow’ful sight, missy. Dey’s been on deck wid dere watch, ob course, but I don’ reckon dey had berry much ter say wid de men. It looks to yer ole uncle like as if all han’s got skeered wid de speechifyin’ de cap’n gib ’em. Leastways, de yeller fellers has ’n been nosin’ roun’ talkin’ wid de res’ ob de crew, an’ when dey cum nigh de galley, bof ob ’em was mighty civil.”

It was Mr. Bean’s watch below when supper was served, and the young girl repeated to both him and the captain the report made by the steward, saying, in conclusion :

“It does n’t seem as if there is much danger that you will have any trouble with the men, captain. Surely, if they were meditating mischief something would have been done before this.”

“Yes, it stands to reason this morning was their best time, and I believe, with you, that there’s no need to

worry. Those Manilamen can't have much influence over the majority of the crew, for, as a rule, white sailors don't take kindly to coolies."

"All hands appear to be very quiet to-day. There's less talking among themselves than I have seen since we left port," Mr. Bean added, "and that's one thing I don't like about the situation."

"What do you want?" Miss Dunham asked. "Would it please you better if they held whispered conversations, as they have been doing?"

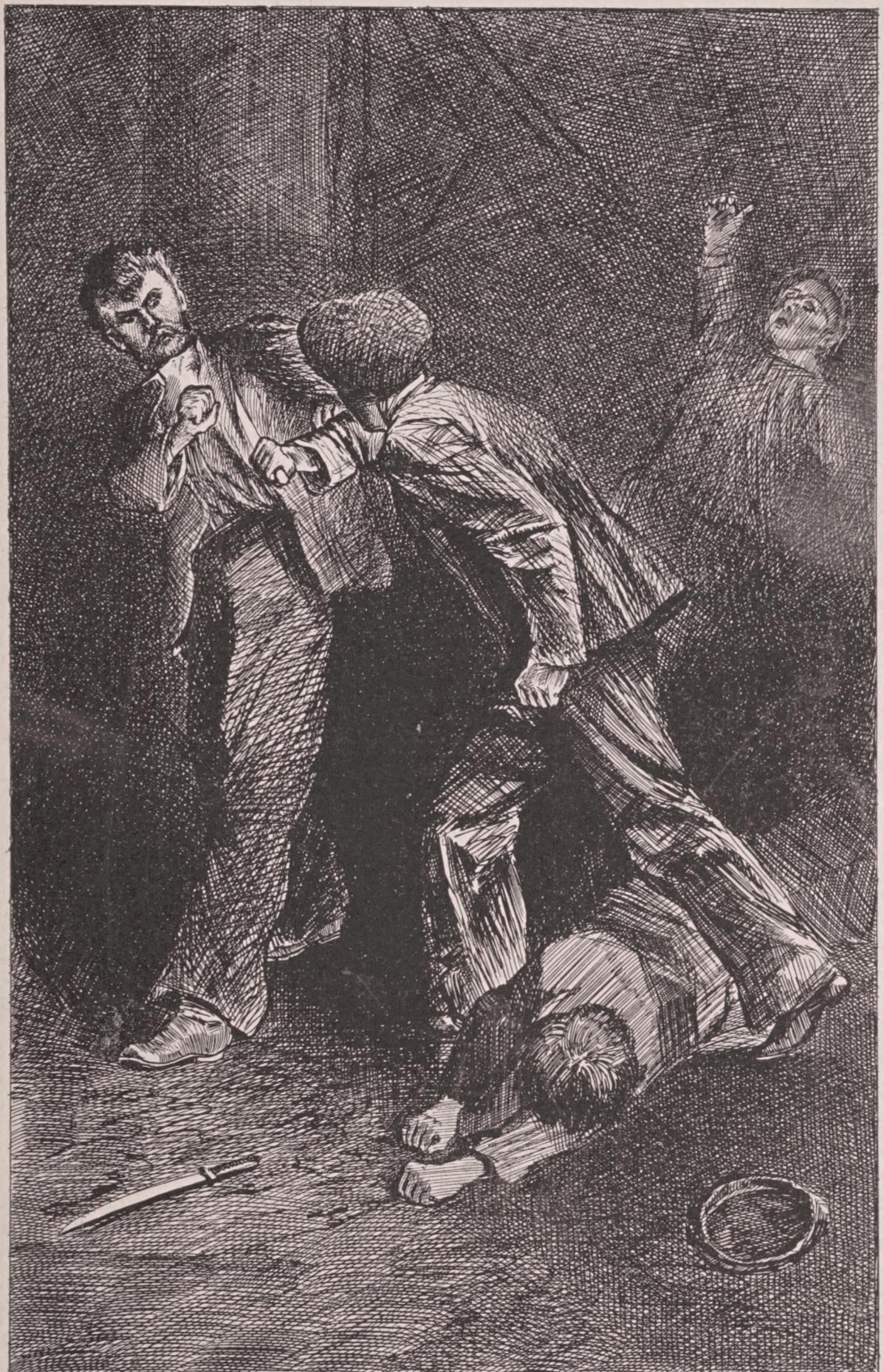
"No; but yet I object to having them so unusually quiet. It is natural for a sailor to chat with his mates when there is nothing to be done, and these fellows are moonin' around like ghosts."

"Better that than getting off by themselves to hatch mischief," Ben replied, and then the subject was dismissed, for even Mr. Bean, despite his assertion that he did not fancy the general behaviour of the men, no longer thought there was danger of serious trouble, provided the brig put into Ascension.

To all appearances matters were in the pleasantest possible shape during the evening.

At midnight the second officer came on deck to relieve Mr. Bean, and the latter reported everything moving smoothly.

The greater number of those belonging to the first mate's watch, whose time of duty had expired, were going toward the forecastle, the other men were turning out, and the two officers stood for a moment discussing the



“MR. BEAN WAS NOT YET WHOLLY DISABLED.”

question as to whether it might not be advisable to set the studdingsails, when, from the gloom near the forward cabin companionway, the two Manilamen darted.

Both the officers were taken so completely by surprise that they did not have time to cry out, or even raise their hands, before the yellow mutineers had each dealt a blow with his keen Malay creese.

Mr. Rogers sank to the deck like one who has received his death wound; but Mr. Bean was not yet wholly disabled. His antagonist had been forced to strike at him across the body of the second mate, and, owing to this fact, the blow was a glancing one; but he had received a knife thrust in the stomach which bid fair to prove mortal.

Swinging himself around suddenly, nerved to desperation by the belief that his last moment had come, he struck out with sufficient force to send one of the Manilamen spinning across the deck, and then, shouting for all true men to follow, he ran hastily into the cabin, fastening the companionway doors behind him as well as was possible in his excitement and haste.

“It is mutiny, captain! Mutiny and murder!” he shrieked, and the words had hardly been uttered when Ben rushed from his room.

“Who is it?” the young captain cried, for the saloon lamp was burning so low that objects could not be distinctly seen.

“It is Bean, and done for, I guess. Look out for the other companionway while I arm myself!”

Ben sprang to obey his subordinate’s command, and

the latter started swiftly toward his room, but before he could gain the door was so enfeebled by the copious loss of blood that he sank an inert mass upon the cabin floor.

By this time Ben had succeeded in fastening the doors and hatch, and Miss Dunham, with a loose wrapper thrown over her night-dress, came from her room, meeting the young captain just as he approached the fallen man.

“Leave me to attend to him,” she said, “while you arm yourself! There may yet be time to regain possession of the deck!”

“Don’t attempt it,” Bean said quickly. “It must be that all the men in my watch are concerned in the plot, otherwise those villains would not have dared to make the attack.”

“Where is Rogers?” Ben asked.

“Dead, I think, sir. He fell as if he had received a blow in the heart. The Manilamen stabbed us both at the same moment.”

At this instant shouts and screams could be heard from the deck, and Ben, with a revolver in each hand, ran to the after companionway, unfastening the doors as softly as possible.

Then he made a sudden dash on deck.

There was no one at the wheel, and the brig was running fair before the wind with every inch of canvas drawing, as if instinct taught her to keep true to the course without a helmsman.

“This way, men!” Ben shouted at the full strength of his lungs. “This way, all honest men!”

The group of combatants near the forecastle hatch was all he could see, and to approach them single-handed would have been in the highest degree foolhardy; therefore he remained at his point of vantage waiting an opportunity to find a mark for a bullet, but not daring to shoot indiscriminately into the mass of struggling humanity.

First one man and then another detached himself from the group, coming aft at full speed, and Ben, covering both with his revolvers to guard against possible treachery, saw that they were the sailors in whom he had most confidence among the crew.

“Go below!” he cried; “Miss Dunham will find weapons for you! Get back here as soon as possible! Our lives depend on it!”

Then two others came quickly aft, one armed with a handspike, and the other with what appeared to be a naked knife.

They ran swiftly as if fearing for their lives, and then, apparently without any deliberation, one approached either side of the house.

“Look out there!” Ben shouted, warningly, raising both his revolvers. “This is no time to come in such a fashion, without telling who you are. I don’t propose to be caught between the two of you.”

“It may be death to stop for explanations,” the fellow on the port side cried, Ben recognizing the voice as that of one of the men toward whom no suspicions had been directed; but the sailor on the starboard hand remained silent.

The young captain turned quickly to face the latter, as he shouted :

“ Hold on there until I know who you are ! ”

The man stopped, raised both hands in token of submission, and Ben was in the act of moving forward in order to peer into his face, when it was as if he heard the sound of a heavy crash. Bright lights danced before his eyes, and all was silence.

The fellow on the port side had dealt the captain a crashing blow with the handspike, and, fortunately, the force had been so great as to send him headlong into the cabin.

Miss Dunham had just started toward her room to find bandages, in the hope of stanching the blood which was pouring from Bean’s side, when Ben fell.

She understood instantly what had occurred, and, without waiting to ascertain the extent of the young captain’s injuries, darted up the companionway, pulling the doors inward just as a gleaming knife flashed past her head, burying itself in the combing of the hatchway beneath.

She took no heed of the danger to which she had been exposed, but said to herself triumphantly as she made certain the fastenings were secure :

“ They can’t get in by this way without considerable work,” and then she turned her attention to the unconscious commander of the brig.

There was no show of blood, and Mr. Bean’s danger was greater than the captain’s, therefore, leaving Ben as he had fallen, she kept on to her room for the bandages,

not forgetting while there to arm herself with the revolver she had previously used with such good effect at the Island of Nampang.

“Is the captain dead?” Mr. Bean asked, tremulously, as she began hurriedly to bind up his wounds.

“God forbid! He has evidently been struck on the head, and it was fortunate the blow sent him inside the cabin instead of leaving him on the deck for the murderers to throw overboard.”

“Don’t attend to me; but look out for him.”

“Your necessities are greater than his just now. The flow of blood must be checked at once. Can’t you tell these men what to do toward defending us?” she added, referring to the two sailors who had taken refuge in the cabin, and were now standing irresolutely beside the injured mate.

“Bob, you and Sam overhaul the captain to find a couple of revolvers on him. Each take one, and then stand by the companionways in case there is an attempt made to break in. How many of the men are engaged in these murders?”

“I don’t know, sir,” Bob replied. “It came to me about as sudden as it did to you. Them coolies made some talk a week ago, insisting the brig should put into St. Helena; but they never said anything more to either Sam or me.”

“Do you think all hands but you two were in it?”

“No, sir. Poor Freeman was n’t, for he got the same kind of a knife-thrust you did, and the first I knew of the trouble was when they dropped him over the rail.”

It was not possible for Bean to continue the conversation. The loss of blood had made him so weak that to speak even these few words was an exertion too great for his strength, and Miss Dunham insisted on his remaining silent.

"I can tell you all we know, sir," Sam said, understanding that it was imprudent for the mate to waste the little remaining strength he had ; but realizing that the facts of the matter should be understood as soon as possible. "Bob and I were just coming from the forecastle when the coolies chucked Freeman overboard ; he did n't make any noise, so I reckon was pretty nigh done for by the first blow. I picked up a spare pump-handle that I 'd seen layin' alongside the forecastle hatch, an' turned round in time to knock Jolly Bart down as he struck at Bob. The unlucky part of the whole business is that I did n't kill the villain. Then one of the coolies come up an' made a pass at me, jest as Bob got his back agin the foremast, an' in less time than it takes to tell it the whole crowd was on us. We heard the captain's order, an' got aft pretty lively."

"Do you think you two and Freeman were the only ones who remained true?" Miss Dunham asked, her voice as firm as if it had been some commonplace question.

"I would n't like to say so, miss ; but now I think the matter over, it seems as if pretty nigh all of 'em, but us three, had a hand in it, except the nigger, an' I reckon he 's layin' low in his berth, skeered mighty close to death. You see —"

There was a crashing of glass, and an iron belaying-pin came hurtling through the skylight, striking the table, within a short distance of where Bob had been standing, then rebounding through the panels of the captain's room.

"Get out of range, or they'll soon be able to knock every one of you over," Bean said, feebly; and Miss Dunham motioned for the men to carry the wounded mate to a place of safety, while she, regardless of the enemy who might be taking aim at her, deliberately lowered the flame of the lamp.

Then, her duty, so far as the mate was concerned, being ended, she turned her attention to the unconscious captain.

CHAPTER XIV.

BESIEGED.

BEN did not long remain unconscious after the young girl began bathing his head and neck with water, and, as he sprang to his feet, still half dazed from the effect of the blow, the gloom of the cabin served to confuse him yet more.

"Hello there! What's going on? Who's here?" he asked sharply and quickly.

"The mischief is on deck. You were knocked senseless into the cabin, and have just recovered consciousness," Miss Dunham said, as she laid her hand soothingly on his arm. "Mr. Bean, two of the sailors and myself, are the only ones here. It was necessary to put out the lights, because the mutineers had begun to throw missiles through the skylight."

"How long have I been here?" Ben asked, now in a more rational tone, as he felt for his weapons.

"Not more than three or four minutes. The sailors have your revolvers. Won't you lie down a little while, and let me bring my hartshorn? Perhaps your head is n't just clear yet."

"I think it is, and there's no time to be lost. How is Bean?"

"Injured very severely; but I have partially stopped the flow of blood, and only left him to attend to you."

"You are as good as an angel, and as brave — well, as brave as good women always are, and that is the standard for bravery in this world, I reckon. Now that you have done your duty it is best to keep out of reach of possible harm."

"So I would if you had enough here to help you retake the brig; but as it is I can count for one man, and shall try to do my full share of the work."

"You will count for half a dozen, if it's only in the way of setting an example. Now I must see Bean, and then we will decide upon what is to be done. Where did you leave him?"

"In his room."

There was no time for delay.

Ben pressed the young girl's hand as the two crossed the saloon, and then inquired of the first officer as to how he was feeling.

"Fairly brisk, but very weak. I hope the loss of blood is the worst of it, and that can soon be atoned for, though heaven knows this is the time when you need all my strength."

"Don't think of that," Ben replied, cheerily. "We must get along with what we've got, and it's fortunate there are yet two true-hearted men in the crew. Miss Dunham, if you give Bean a generous dose of brandy it will help pull him together a bit, and I'll see what can be done in the way of getting out of this scrape."

The young girl acted upon this suggestion at once, and after talking with the two sailors Ben arrived at something nearly approaching the true state of affairs.

It was positive one of the men, as well as the second mate, had been killed.

Including the officers, the *Progressive Age* had left Hong Kong with twelve men on board, thirteen all told, numbering Miss Dunham as one of the ship's company. Two of these were now known to be dead, four were in the saloon, and, in case the steward was in his berth off the pantry, there would be but five mutineers in charge of the deck.

"There," Ben said, when he had figured this matter out in his mind. "You see the odds are not against us, after all. Allowing the five others to be mutineers, and not counting Mr. Bean or old Eliphilet, there are three of us, and we should be able to give the rascals as much of a dose as they need."

"Except that they have got the upper hands of us by being on deck while we are below," Bob suggested.

"We'll soon be able to turn the tide in our direction, I hope," Ben replied. "The greatest danger is that the villains may, through ignorance, allow the brig to do herself some damage. Sam, see if you can find the steward, while Miss Dunham and I get together all the weapons and ammunition we can muster."

Sam had a very good idea of where Eliphilet could be found, if he was not in the power of the mutineers, and went directly to the small storeroom alongside the pantry where the old darkey slept.

The door was locked, and, peeping through the keyhole, he saw that the key was on the inside.

"Come out of there, uncle! It's all right, and nobody down here but friends."

Twice did Sam repeat this statement without receiving any reply, and then he cried, angrily:

"See here, Eliphilet, the captain has sent for you! All hands of us are locked in the cabin, an' it's your business to turn out so's to help the thing along! There is n't any time for foolin', an', if the word comes to break this door open, my idea is the steward of this craft will suffer considerably."

This threat was sufficient to bring the old darkey to terms, and an instant later the door was opened cautiously.

Uncle Eliphilet's face was of an ashen-gray hue, and, if his hair had not been kinked quite so tightly, it is only reasonable to suppose it would have stood straight on end.

"Wha — wha — wha 's — "

His teeth were chattering with fear so severely that it was impossible to utter an intelligible sound, and Sam said, impatiently, as, seizing the old fellow by the shoulder, he dragged him toward the saloon:

"Don't wag your jaw like a bloomin' idjut; but come in here an' see what can be done. This is a time when every mother's son below has got to do his full share of work, an' you among the rest."

Eliphilet was still in the same daze of fear when the sailor dragged him into the cabin; but the sight of Miss

Dunham seemed to restore to him a portion of his courage, if, indeed, he ever had any, and he contrived to walk without assistance when she told him to go into the captain's room.

Ben was there overhauling his baggage in the search for ammunition, and asked, quickly, as Eliphilet entered :

“Where were you when this row began?”

“De ole man was done tucked up in bed, sah.”

“Then you did n't see any of the trouble?”

“No, sah; but I done heard plenty. 'Pears dem yeller debbils went ter slashin' an' cuttin' at a terrifical rate, sah, like a lot of fool niggers on de rampage.”

“Did n't you venture to look out when the noise began?”

“No, sah, dis yere ole darkey knowed too much fur dat.”

“Then, of course, you can't give us any information. Go into Mr. Bean's room, and see what can be done for him. I reckon you 'll be of more assistance there than in the attempt to recapture the brig, although you did a tidy bit of work when we were fighting the pirates!”

Eliphilet was willing to obey this command. It seemed to him as if the saloon was much too large for safety at such a time, and that the smaller his place of refuge the less the danger.

The first officer had remained in a conscious state through sheer force of will. But for the perils which threatened he would have succumbed to the deathly faintness which assailed him. None knew better than

he how necessary it was he should retain the possession of his faculties, for the position of affairs was such that even a dying man might be of some assistance before the struggle came to an end.

There was very little the steward could do for the sufferer; but his presence in the room prevented the necessity of some other member of the small party spending any time in attendance upon the patient, and this in itself was quite an important item.

A revolver was found in Mr. Rogers's apartment, and with it seventy-five or an hundred cartridges.

Ben had his own weapon, and also the one formerly owned by Captain Dunham; but his supply of ammunition was not as great as it would have been but for the engagement at Nampang Island.

Miss Dunham was armed with her own revolver and a goodly number of cartridges, while Mr. Bean would retain his weapon in case it should be necessary to defend himself at short range.

Ben gave Bob the revolver taken from Mr. Rogers's chest, and to Sam the one which had belonged to Captain Dunham.

By this distribution all, save the steward, were fairly well armed, as compared with the party in possession of the deck, and, but for the difficulty of leaving their place of refuge without exposing themselves, the fortunes of this particular struggle would have been changed very speedily.

“You won’t think of attempting to do anything to-

night," Miss Dunham said, when Ben had finished arming his little troop.

"Every moment is precious, and it stands us in hand to see that none are wasted."

"It is even more necessary you should think first of your own safety."

"But I am doing that in attacking the scoundrels as soon as possible."

"I don't think so," she said, hesitatingly, "and yet at such a time I have no right to oppose your plans, other than this: If by an ill-advised move you and these two sailors should be overpowered, remember what my position would be."

"If for a moment I forgot what might happen, it was not because you are ever absent from my thoughts. Your safety is of more value to me than a dozen brigs."

"And in order to insure that, it is necessary you take every precaution to save your own life."

"I shall pull you through, unless I make a mistake, and in that case—"

"In that case I have this," touching her weapon significantly, as she laid one hand, half caressingly, on his shoulder.

Ben clasped her in his arms for an instant.

There was no necessity then for words.

Each understood the other as if their love-making had been conducted under the most favourable circumstances, and after this brief caress the young captain said, in a voice which had a ring of triumph:

"Now you must be guided by me, so far as your own precious self is concerned."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Stay in your room, or Bean's, out of the way of a possible shot from above. If it so happens that we are in danger of being overpowered, you shall join in the fight. Of that you have my word. Now tell me why you did not think it best to make an immediate attack upon the murderers?"

"Because, in the first flush of their victory they will be unusually watchful. It is more than probable both exits are guarded carefully in anticipation of exactly what you propose doing. I suggest that you wait until possession has made them careless. There are many things which may happen in our favour between now and morning. The first thought of some of the men will be the spirit room, and when that has been broken into and its contents at their disposal, your work will be simplified."

"I begin to believe you are always right, and it is the position of captain which belongs to you."

"I would prefer to continue as chief mate," she said, shyly, and then, as if remembering what he had asked her to do, went into Mr. Bean's room.

She had hardly left the saloon when a crash of glass was heard, mingled with the fall of missiles upon the table, and there was barely time for Ben to leap backward into his own apartment before the shower fell.

Had the young girl remained in the position she occupied while talking with the captain, her death would

have been inevitable, for the stationary chair upon which she had been leaning was splintered into fragments, and this fact gave Ben to understand that it was more necessary he should make some effort to guard his little crew against another assault of this kind, than to attack the mutineers immediately.

“Come below with me, Bob,” he said, as he opened the small hatch leading to the lazaret. “If we can put up something to screen the skylight, it will be possible for us to move around without danger of having our heads split open.”

While making the inspection of the brig on first taking command, he remembered having seen a couple of new topsails in this place, and to bring these into the saloon was now his object.

In the lazaret the general stores were also kept, and he found sufficient rope of convenient size with which to carry his plan into execution.

Half an hour later both topsails were suspended directly beneath the skylight, the ends being made fast to different corners of the saloon, and the double thickness of canvas would resist any ordinary weight which might be thrown upon it from above.

This screen would also shut the inmates of the saloon out from view of those on deck, and now it was possible to light the lamps once more, for until this was done they had been forced to move around in darkness.

“I reckon we ’ll keep those fellows from using us as targets,” Ben said, in a tone of satisfaction, “and there’s

little danger they will expose their precious bodies as much as would be necessary in forcing open either of the doors. We can count on being unmolested until morning at least. Now the most important question in my mind is, what these scoundrels propose to do with the brig?"

"I don't see that they'll make much of a fist at anything but keeping her on her course, sir," Sam replied. "None of 'em understand navigation, so far as I have learned, and, unless they are countin' on abandonin' her, it's a case of trying to strike Ascension by a clear streak of luck."

"Have you heard them talking about any place in particular, which would give us a clue as to what they intend doing?" Ben asked.

"Not a word, sir. We would n't listen to any chin from the coolies, so everything was kept mighty quiet from us."

"Well, the only thing to be done now is to remain at your stations by the doors ready for an attack, in case they should make one, and at the same time hear anything which may be said close at hand."

There was nothing more Ben could do then, for he intended to act upon his sweetheart's advice by waiting until morning before assuming the offensive, and he went into the wounded mate's room.

Old Eliphilet was curled up in one corner, evidently with a view of occupying as small a space as possible, in order that but little of his body could be used as a target, and absolutely deprived, by fear, of the power of speech.

Miss Dunham was seated by the side of the mate, who looked rather better for the stimulant administered, and Bean said, in reply to Ben's question :

"I am feeling a bit more like myself, sir, now the flow of blood has stopped ; but I'm afraid that yellow scoundrel gave me all I need in this world."

"Nonsense, man ! You must n't lose courage now of all times. We'll pull you clear of this, or I'm a Dutchman. Why, you're looking fifty per cent. better than when I first saw you."

"And I'm feeling a good bit easier, sir ; but it seems as if something should be done to this cut of mine."

"I think it is wisest to remain as you are a while longer. To disturb the bandages now would only bring on a fresh hemorrhage," the young girl interrupted.

"Is there any danger he may be bleeding internally ?" Ben asked.

"That I cannot say," Miss Dunham replied. "I have had very little experience in such things, but it seems to me, if he was in any such danger, the pain would be greater, and, at present, he says he does not suffer."

"I've got to take my chances," Mr. Bean said, quietly, "and it is n't for you to waste any time on me. What's done cannot be undone, so far as I'm concerned, and if you don't fool around here, you'll stand so much better chance to get possession of the brig once more."

"We don't intend to fool around with you," Ben replied. "After you feel a bit stronger, I'll see what can be done in the way of sewing up the wound ; but until then I

think as Miss Dunham does, that it will be safer for you to remain perfectly quiet."

Then, as a means of distracting the invalid's attention from his own condition, Ben explained what he had done to secure the safety of those in the saloon, and when he concluded the mate asked :

"Have you made any plans for morning, sir?"

"None whatever. It's a case of waiting for something to turn up, so far as I can see. If the men should broach the spirits to-night we'll have fairly plain sailing. It's only a question of getting out of this place without being knocked in the head, as would surely happen if we attempted to go through either companionway at present."

"Do you think the men have any firearms, sir?"

"There's one revolver among them, that much I know, for I heard the report of it just after you came below."

"Don't you remember the pantry has a window overlooking the deck?"

Ben started as if electrified.

"That's the very idea, Bean. It would be a work of half a dozen seconds to knock away a few slats from the shutter, and then one man inside could keep the deck clear forward of the mainmast so long as his ammunition held out. I'll try that scheme as soon as it is light, and luck will be mightily against us if we don't get a shot at some of those villains before they are aware I've got the drop on them."

"I think it's the best plan you could form, sir," the mate replied, "and in case you should be fortunate enough

to find more than half of them in range when you burst through the shutter, the job is as good as done, for, of course, you don't intend to show any mercy to them."

"I shall shoot to bring down my man, and will answer for all that are in sight when I am once at the window."

It surely seemed as if this was a plan which might succeed, and, once it was decided upon, all the besieged, with the possible exception of Uncle Eliphilet, felt decidedly more at ease.

"I shall take my stand as soon as daylight," Ben said to Bob and Sam, after having explained the scheme to them. "You are to remain at your posts here. No matter what may be going on where I am, don't attempt to come to my rescue, even if I am getting the worst of it, for that would leave the companionways unguarded, and it is Miss Dunham who must be thought of rather than me. Look to her in case they seem to be getting the best of us, and remember that it is better she should receive your last bullet than fall into the clutches of these scoundrels."

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE.

BEN passed the hours which elapsed before the time he had set for the opening of the battle in alternately visiting the sailors at their posts and the sick man in his room.

His head was clear, so far as his reasoning faculties were concerned, but it buzzed and whirled, owing to the heavy blow given him by the mutineers, in a manner which, at any other time, would have forced him to retire to his room in the hope of gaining some relief from the terrible pain.

He could not afford to "nurse himself" just now, and kept on with his work as if he was in the best possible mental and bodily condition.

When he had completed his rounds the second time, Bob, who was stationed at the after companionway, whispered :

"The Manilamen have been here talking with the man at the wheel. I couldn't make out rightly what they said, but, as near as I heard, the idea was to set fire to the brig, an' then abandon her, leavin' us to be first smoked an' then drowned, like rats in a trap."

"Did it appear to be decided on that such a thing should be done, or were they only discussing the plan?"

"I could n't say exactly, but it seemed like as if they was tryin' to persuade the helmsman it oughter be fixed that way. It 's no use to listen now," the sailor added, as Ben crept softly toward the door. "They went forward five minutes ago, and I reckon there's nobody this way but him who 's at the wheel."

Ben visited Sam, who reported that he had heard nothing, save, now and then, the sound of footsteps along the deck.

"It stands to reason they believe we 're trying to make out what they are doin', so won't keep very nigh here," the sailor added, and Ben crept noiselessly into the pantry, arriving at the open window which was screened by the shutter of slats, just as two of the mutineers came in that direction.

"I don't hold to it that we've got any call to set the brig on fire," one of the newcomers said. "What did we put our necks in a halter for? Jest to get a chance to destroy the brig? Not much. When them coolies talked to me 'bout what we'd do, it was only with the idee that the captain should put back to St. Helena; but now they reckon on burnin' the craft, an', if their plans are carried out, I 'd like to know what we 've made out of this ere mutiny?"

"Put our necks in a noose for a couple of yeller skinned villains, that 's what we 've done," the other sailor replied, gravely. "We acted more like babies than men, letting them pull us into the scrape; but now we 're here, it 's a case of stayin', for there 's no other way out of it."

"Then you think we oughter hold on to the brig a while longer?"

"Of course, an' we must take care of our necks, get one of the boats into condition, provision her, an' abandon this craft. I've got an idee that them in the cabin will lead us a pretty dance before they give up tryin' to square matters, so I go in for lookin' after my own skin."

The men moved further away by the time the second speaker finished, and it was no longer possible for Ben to hear the conversation; but he had learned sufficient to give him renewed courage, for he knew now that at least two of the mutineers regretted what they had done, and, when the proper time came, it was quite possible both would be more than willing to return to duty, if he allowed it.

He remained at the window several moments longer, but without learning anything more, for the majority of the mutineers staid forward, where, as a matter of course, it was impossible to overhear their conversation.

To his disappointment, he did not distinguish any sounds of revelry, as would have been the case if they had broken into the spirit room as Miss Dunham hoped they might, and, remaining only long enough to assure himself the slats of the shutter could easily be shattered, he returned to the cabin.

Bean had fallen into a light doze, and the young girl was standing on the threshold of the invalid's room awaiting the captain's return.

Beckoning for her to come to the opposite side of the

saloon, that the wounded mate might not be disturbed by the conversation, Ben repeated the little which he had learned, and concluded by saying:

“I am confident the scheme which Bean suggested will prove successful, and the time is very near at hand when it must be begun. Remember what I have said, and so long as we have the upper hands of these fellows, remain in your room, from the time the firing begins until you hear from me.”

“If I could do any good, I should insist on standing by your side during the fight.”

“But you cannot, and are sensible enough to understand you might seriously hamper my movements. Only one person can be of any service until the plan has shown itself either a success or a failure, and you shall know when that time arrives.”

“There is no reason why I should not stay with Mr. Bean instead of in my own room?”

“Certainly not, and, in fact, that would be the best place, for he might get excited and insist on coming out, which must be prevented at all hazards. The sailors are to remain where they are, to prevent a rush from the mutineers in case of my failure, and you can judge from the frequency of the reports whether I am able to do any execution or not.”

“You will not expose yourself unnecessarily, cap — Benj, dear?”

The young captain clasped his very lovable little “chief mate” in his arms for an instant; then led her to Bean’s

room and softly closed the door, going at once to the place from which he intended to begin the battle.

The day would break in less than half an hour.

He had no preparations to make, save to place the cartridges on a shelf where they could be gotten at most readily, and assure himself his weapons were loaded, for he had taken Miss Dunham's revolver on this occasion, in order that he might discharge the greatest possible number of shots at the moment when the mutineers were first surprised.

Listening intently he could hear nothing which betokened that the men were in the vicinity of the window, and, that the time might seem to pass more rapidly, he began cutting at the slats of the shutter with his knife so there should be no question of their breaking when he was ready to open hostilities.

It was as if the day would never come, and this time of inaction, just before the battle which might end all days in this life for him, was filled with anxiety and apprehension.

Then the growing light came stealing over the restless water ; the veil of darkness was lifted gradually, and

“ The wind came up out of the sea,
And said, ‘ Oh, mist, make room for me.’
It hailed the ships and cried :
‘ Sail on, ye mariners, the night is done.’ ”

As soon as it was possible for him to distinguish objects within the room, he knew the time had arrived when he

could see clearly all that was on the deck of the brig, and, mentally bracing himself for the struggle which was to come, he shattered the slats of the shutter with one of Eliphilet's rolling-pins.

There were but three men to be seen when the barrier was thus removed, — the two coolies and Jolly Bart.

He could have no compunction in shooting either of these three down, for he knew they were dangerous characters, in whose word no reliance could be placed.

The mutineers had turned on hearing the crash of the wood-work, and before they could have satisfied themselves as to what caused the noise, Ben fired at the coolie standing nearest him.

His aim was not as deadly as he had hoped it would be.

The ball struck the fellow on the right shoulder, spinning him around like a top, and thoroughly disabling his arm, as could be seen when he attempted to recover his balance.

Then one, two, three bullets speeded forward in rapid succession ; but only one of them found its mark.

Bart was brought to the deck by a ball in the knee, and the second Manilaman sought refuge on the opposite side of the foremast.

Now it was Ben's turn to act as a target, and he learned beyond a question that there was at least one revolver in the hands of the mutineers.

The coolie fired twice in rapid succession, but, owing to the fact that he did not dare come out from his sheltered position in order to take aim, his bullets went wide of

their intended mark, and must have seemed more dangerous to the helmsman than to the young captain.

Bart and the wounded coolie succeeded in getting themselves under cover, and that they had no firearms appeared positive, otherwise a fusillade would have been opened.

Ben held possession of this portion of the deck, so far as preventing any one from coming aft was concerned, but he had not yet paved the way for himself and his companions to leave the cabin in safety, since the Manilaman, sheltered by the foremast, could make it exceedingly uncomfortable for them.

Ben's first thought was to rush forward with Bob and Sam, trusting that there was only one man at the wheel, and overpower the fellow with the revolver at all hazards. But almost as soon as this idea came into his mind it was rejected by the thought that it would be a foolhardy proceeding.

He would have, in case he finally gained possession of the deck, only two sailors as able-bodied men, to help work the vessel, and if one of these should be wounded in the rush it would be almost impossible to sail the little craft even so far as Ascension.

Then again, in case he himself should be killed, or so wounded as to be unable to navigate the brig, the chances of getting her into port would be very small.

"It won't pay to run any risk, however slight," he muttered to himself. "The loss of one man at this time would be most disastrous, and it is better to spend a few hours longer on the job than to spoil all by too much

haste. I reckon I can tire that yellow fellow out after a time."

Then seating himself, with the revolver resting on the sill of the window in order that he might take the better aim, Ben remained with his eyes fixed upon the spot where the mutineer was sheltered, watching for the slightest portion of his body which would serve as a target.

It was tedious work; but neglect of it even for a single instant might mean death, and, under such circumstances, one is very likely to keep a keen lookout.

When twenty minutes had elapsed a light step was heard approaching the pantry door, and, without turning his head, Ben knew that the girl whom he loved was approaching.

"May I come in?" she asked, in a low tone.

"You may look through the door, but don't venture any further."

"What are you doing?" she asked, after gaining a good idea of the condition of affairs by seeing his position of extreme watchfulness.

"Trying to wing that yellow villain who is sheltered by the foremast, and waiting for a shot at me as anxiously as I am for one at him."

"What was the result of the firing I heard a short time ago?"

"Bart has got a ball in his knee, and the coolie's shoulder must be splintered considerably," Ben replied, grimly. "They have crawled out of sight, one behind the water-casks, and the other among the cables. We

can't count them as being totally disabled, but if I can get another shot at either, I'll run the risk of the second villain's peppering me."

"Then he is the only one who has a revolver?"

"Evidently so, or there would have been a concerted attack made before this. I wonder if Sam has heard anything from the after companionway? I'd give a good bit to know how many there are at the wheel."

"He heard two talking immediately after you fired, and if you have seen three, that must make up the list of mutineers, according to the way you figured it last night."

"Then I'll station Bob here, and let him keep the coolie in check while with Sam I make a rush aft. We shall then virtually have possession of the brig, and it can't be a great while before that fellow has to surrender."

"But do you think Bob is as good a marksman as you?"

"I fancy he isn't; sailors are not generally given to such things; but it can't be helped, for I'm not disposed to spend all day watching that scoundrel, and allow him to give me the slip when it comes dark."

"Why not let me take your place here? I can certainly use a revolver better than Bob?"

"I am quite well aware of that fact, but at the same time don't intend to countenance anything of the kind. I promised that you should join in the battle in case we were close pressed, but sha'n't allow you to run any risk when there's no absolute necessity of doing so, therefore you must remain under cover as has been agreed upon. Will you call Bob?"

Miss Dunham made no protest at being deprived of an opportunity to assist in the retaking of the ship; but obeyed, although believing she could have done better work at that particular point than either of the men.

“Bob,” Ben said, without moving his eyes as the sailor entered, “stand behind me, and tell me what you see directly forward of the foremast.”

The man obeyed, but it was some time before he distinguished anything.

“It seems as if I could get a glint of white now an’ then; but I can’t make out for certain.”

“You are right, there is a glint of white now and then, and there’s a body there, too. One of the coolies is laying for a chance to shoot me, and will do so without a question, if I give him an opportunity to take aim. Now I want you to stand or sit here in my place, and, remember, your life depends upon keeping that fellow well in hand. If you allow him three seconds in which to peep out from behind his shelter you ’ll never sign articles again in this world. Here are plenty of cartridges, you can exchange revolvers with me, and don’t hesitate about wasting a shot, for it is better to let him know you are on the alert, than try to save powder and balls. I am going to trust that whoever is at the wheel is without firearms, and Sam and I will make a rush up the companionway.”

“It’s a good plan, sir, and I’ll go bail there is n’t another revolver on the brig except what that yellow skin has got. With one of our own crowd at the wheel, I ’ll feel safer about the old hooker, for then we shall know

where we are going, an' as things stand now, nobody can tell how soon we'll fetch up."

Bob had taken his station directly in the rear of Ben while he was speaking, and, satisfying himself that the man was where he could see everything which might happen, the young captain arose to his feet.

"There are two other fellows forward there," the latter said, as he went toward the door of the room, "but they are so badly used up, I don't reckon you'll have any trouble with them. Do your best when the scrimmage begins aft, for then will be the most likely time for that scoundrel to shoot."

Miss Dunham followed her lover into the saloon, and, suddenly remembering that there was another man on board who had not been utilised, Ben asked :

"Is it of any use to attempt to arouse old Eliphilet? It's too bad we should n't use him at this time, when every one counts for so much."

"I don't think it would be of any avail to get him out of Mr. Bean's room. He is so thoroughly frightened as to be worse than helpless."

"But he fought at Nampang Island, and did good service."

"Yes, but you must remember that there the enemy were not on board the brig, and what he did was done in a frenzy, so he was hardly a free agent."

"Well, I wish that same kind of frenzy would overtake him now; he could do us a power of good."

"There is little chance of that while he has an opportunity of remaining where he is."

“How is Bean?”

“Much the same as when you left him. The reports of the revolver awakened him; but I explained what was being done, and then he remained quiet, almost too much so, perhaps.”

“Why do you say so?”

“Because I am afraid he is sinking into that lethargy which often follows a serious wound, and from which it is difficult to arouse the patient.”

“God help us if Bean goes under! However successful we may be with these mutineers, the craft will be in bad condition, so far as handling her is concerned, and I’m not certain that in this case victory won’t be nearly as bad as defeat.”

“Now, you are not talking like yourself,” Miss Dunham said, as she laid her hand on his arm, caressingly. “After having been so brave, you must not begin to grow faint-hearted. The brig could be gotten to Ascension with the two sailors, old Eliphilet and myself as crew, and she will be there in due time, for I predict you are soon to have complete possession of the deck.”

“You are a dear girl, whether you are a true prophet or not,” Ben said, as he kissed her.

“We will hope that I am both,” she replied, heartily.

“I am certain of the first, and a few moments will decide the last. Now go into Mr. Bean’s room, and the next time I have an opportunity of speaking with you the fate of the brig will have been settled.”

Then Ben explained to Sam what it was he proposed doing, and said, in conclusion :

“We will open the doors as softly as possible, but I don’t think there is any chance of our being able to surprise them very much. Instantly the way is clear, dash out and shoot the best you know how, unless the man shows he is willing to surrender. Is your revolver ready?”

“Yes, sir,” Sam replied, grimly. “I didn’t count on stayin’ here where they might make a break any minute without havin’ it in good workin’ order.”

“Then stand by my side and be ready to fire; but in case there is no one to be seen we must n’t venture out for fear of being knocked in the head. My idea is that the helmsman and his mate, whoever he may be, will make a rush forward as soon as we fling the doors open, or stand by to club us as we ascend, and this last possibility is what we must guard against. Are you ready?”

“Ay, ay, sir!”

“Then here we go!” and Ben hastily slipped back the bolt of the door.

CHAPTER XVI.

RECAPTURE.

FORTUNE favored him just at this instant, for even while he was pushing back the bolts the sharp crack of the revolver from the forward portion of the brig told that Bob and the Manilaman were exchanging compliments, and, as a matter of course, this distracted the attention of the man at the wheel from what might be going on at the companionway.

When Ben flung open the doors but one of the mutineers could be seen, and he was gazing forward so intently that, before he was aware of the fact, the young captain had covered him with his weapon.

“Keep your hands on the spokes of that wheel, and don’t dare to so much as yip, or I’ll put a ball through your head!” Ben said, in a low tone, taking good care not to rise to his full height, lest the mutineers forward should learn that he had gained control of the after portion of the brig.

“I ain’t meanin’ to make any trouble, sir,” the man said, with a whine.

“And I ain’t reckoning on letting you,” Ben replied, grimly. “Sam, find something with which to make this

villain fast, and move quick about it ; there 's no knowing when some of the crew may attempt to come aft."

The sailor obeyed instantly, and Ben remained at the head of the companionway, holding the man in check with his revolver, on the alert for any sign of danger.

This portion of the scheme had worked so smoothly, and had been such a decided success, that he could not believe he was to accomplish his task so readily.

It seemed as if of necessity there must some further complication arise, before he could secure this mutineer who had allowed himself to be taken prisoner in such a simple fashion.

Sam was a willing labourer in the task of securing the captive.

In order that he might not expose himself to the view of those forward, he tied first the sailor's legs, and then, forcing him to a sitting position, lashed his hands behind his back.

"I can steer without bringing my head above the house, sir," Sam said, as, his work done, he crawled on his knees to the binnacle in order to get some idea of the course.

"All right, there 's no need of doing much more than simply keeping the muslin full. I reckon this part of the performance will soon come to an end," Ben said, cheerily, and then, turning to the prisoner, he asked, sternly : "Where is your mate ? "

"He started around the port side of the house, sir, and has come to an anchor somewhere between here and the main hatch, on account of that shootin', I reckon."

"Have you still got your revolver with you, Sam?"

"Yes, sir, I'm holdin' on to that while I've got such shipmates as are aboard of this 'ere hooker."

"Have it ready, and if this fellow makes the least noise while I'm gone, shoot him as you would a dog. I'll try and gather in his mate."

"Accordin' to my way of thinkin' the best plan would be to shoot him first; he ain't worth savin'," Sam said, in a tone of contempt.

"So long as he keeps quiet, don't interfere with him," Ben replied, sharply, and then he crept softly around the house on the port side.

In less than thirty seconds the helmsman heard him say, in a low, quick tone:

"Put up your hands and follow me without making the least sound that can be heard by those scoundrels forward, or I'll bore a hole in your worthless body. Move lively, and be quiet about it!"

Then the second mutineer was brought aft, and the little brig steered herself while Sam secured this one as he had the first.

"There," Ben said, in a tone of relief, when the prisoner was made fast and Sam had taken the wheel again, "it strikes me we are getting along mighty well. There's only one able-bodied man left of all the crowd, and if three of us can't get the best of him during the next hour, we deserve to lose the brig."

"If you could get that bloomin' nigger ^{up} here to take the wheel, I'd like to have a hand in this thing myself,"

Sam muttered. "He ain't any earthly use where he is now, an' it seems as if we oughter turn him to some account."

"It would only be a waste of time to try it, my man. He's too thoroughly frightened to be of any assistance, even if we should drag him on the deck. The job isn't such a difficult one that we can't manage it among ourselves, and, if necessary, you could make the wheel fast and join us. With this breeze, and under the canvas she has spread, the little craft would steer herself without a rudder."

Then Ben went below to inform his sweetheart of the good tidings.

"Wasn't there any one at the wheel?" she asked, as she came from Mr. Bean's room, for Ben and Sam had done their work in such a quiet manner that she could not believe they had as yet been successful.

"Just peep out of the companionway once. Be careful not to show your head above the house, and you'll see how we got along," Ben replied, in a tone of triumph, and, as Miss Dunham acted upon this suggestion, he stood by the side of the mate.

"We've got two of them triced up in proper fashion," he said, in reply to Mr. Bean's inquiring look. "Caught them napping, and didn't have any trouble. There are two more wounded, and one of the Manilamen with a revolver is all we've got on our hands, so I reckon it won't be a great while before things will be shipshape once more. How are you feeling by this time?"

“About as usual. I am beginning to think perhaps the hurt was n’t as bad as it might have been.”

“If that’s the case we shall have come out of the scrape better than at one time seemed possible, for — ”

He was interrupted by the rapid discharge of firearms, followed by hoarse cries of rage, and a sound as of some one leaping heavily up on the deck.

Running quickly to the pantry, a single glance was sufficient to show him the cause of the disturbance.

Bob had wounded his man, and, believing the latter’s stock of ammunition was exhausted, jumped from the window of the pantry to bring the battle to a speedy conclusion.

When Ben arrived where he could have a view of the scene, the sailor was pursuing the coolie, who had gone up the fore-rigging, as if fancying in that direction he might find some avenue of escape.

“Don’t shoot him!” Ben cried, as the sailor levelled his revolver at the bleeding wretch who stood half-way to the foretop, hesitating whether to continue on. “Don’t shoot him! I want the satisfaction of taking the scoundrel into port!”

“That you shall never have!” the fellow cried, in what was more like the snarl of an enraged beast than the voice of a human being. “I’d give my life to put a bullet through your head.”

“And I’ll soon put one through yours if you don’t come down from there,” Ben shouted, following Bob’s example in the manner of leaving the pantry, and running forward.

The Manilaman glared at him fiercely for an instant, and then, drawing back his arm suddenly, hurled the revolver directly at the young captain's head with all his strength, as at the same instant he leaped into the sea.

Involuntarily, Sam, at the wheel, shouted "Man overboard!" and with the instincts of a sailor, Bob ran to the davits; but on reaching there realised how impossible it would be to rescue the mutineer.

The brig was running at the rate of five or six knots an hour, and there were not men enough to heave her to and lower the boat before the unhappy wretch would have gone to that Captain against whom no mutinous conduct could ever prevail.

"It's no use," Ben shouted. "Even if you got the boat over in time, he would fight against being taken on board, for he has sense enough to know that it's only a question of choosing between drowning or hanging, and he evidently prefers the former. Come on here, let's rout these other fellows out."

There was no necessity of doing very much hunting, for the two remaining mutineers, wounded as they were, and unarmed save in the way of knives, knew that any resistance on their part would be worse than useless.

Before the young captain had time to act upon his own command, the fellows came creeping out of their places of concealment, throwing their weapons on the deck in front of them in token of submission.

"Got enough of it, eh?" Ben asked, sharply.

"Yes," Bart said, sulkily. "Even if I was sich a fool

as not to know how to keep my nose out of this scrape, I've still sense enough left to see there's no use kickin' now, an' I'm willin' to take my dose like a man."

"Are you badly wounded?"

"I don't know as to that, sir. I hope I've got as much as will serve me out, for it ain't pleasant to think of what's certain to come," and Bart stood before the young captain like a man from whom all hope has departed.

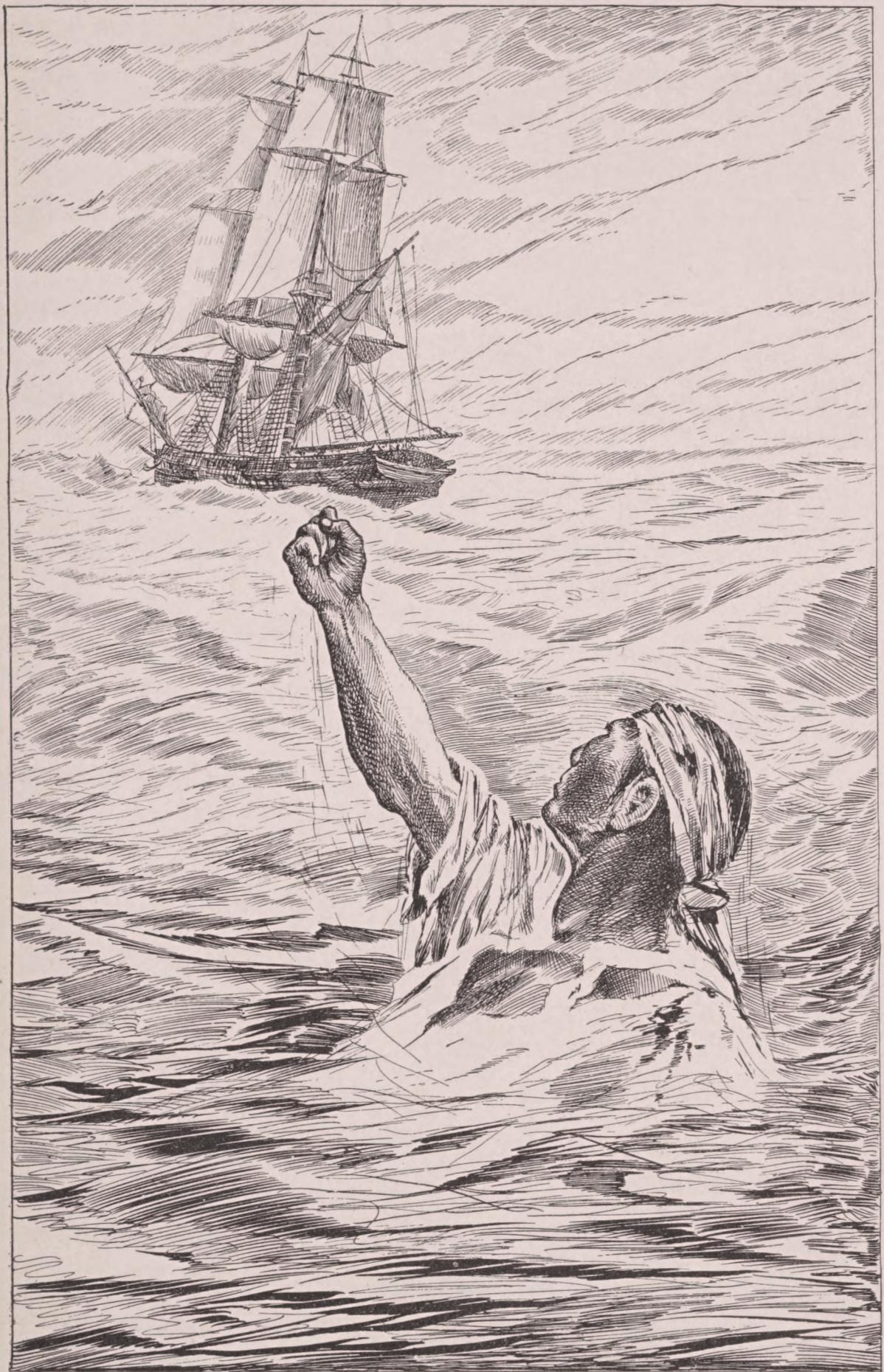
Bob picked up the knives as if fancying the mutineers might attempt to regain possession of them, and Ben turned to the second coolie, who was standing with his back against the rail, the blood from the wound in his shoulder staining the deck a brilliant crimson.

"Are you ready to submit with as good a grace as your mate has?" Ben asked, sternly.

"Never!" the man hissed. "I'll follow Isdra first," and, before either Ben or Bob could interpose, he had swung himself over the rail by aid of the uninjured arm, disappearing beneath the waves to reappear a moment later far astern in the wake of the brig he had attempted to destroy.

"If them two had done that same bloomin' thing before they come aboard this 'ere craft, we should n't have had so much trouble," Bob said, turning to gaze after the drowning man.

At this moment, Sam, who had risen to his feet when the first coolie leaped from the shrouds, gave vent to a shout of triumph, and Miss Dunham appeared by his side looking thoroughly astonished that the recapture of the



“IN THE WAKE OF THE BRIG HE HAD ATTEMPTED TO DESTROY.”

little craft should have been accomplished in so short a time, and with such little difficulty, considering the advantage the mutineers had a few moments previous.

“Stay where you are till we get things shipshape,” Ben shouted, for he did not want her to see the sanguinary stains on the deck, which told how cheaply a human life had been held as against the gratifications of brutal passions. “Can’t you scour that out?” he asked, pointing to the place marked by the life-blood of Rogers.

“I’ll do the best I can, sir; but it is an old sayin’ that that kind of colourin’ never comes out of a plank, an’ I reckon it’s a true one,” Bob replied, as he set about the task.

“Now, my man,” Ben said, turning to Bart, “can you get into the forecastle without help?”

“I reckon I can, sir. If I wasn’t such a coward I’d follow the coolies, for then I’d be better off.”

“Don’t show the white feather now. You’ve had your fling, and must expect to pay for it. Get below, and I’ll see what can be done toward dressing your wounds.” Then he shouted to Sam, “how is she heading?”

“Nor’ nor’west, sir.”

“Hold her so.”

Then Ben went aft, seeming to think it necessary to clasp both Miss Dunham’s hands in his, in token of the victory won, and she asked :

“Now that the worst is over, will you be able to work the brig up to Ascension with what men you’ve got?”

“Of course we shall, my hearty,” Ben replied, cheerily.

“If we ran from Nampang to Hong Kong with three yellow-skinned pirates as crew, I reckon Bob, Sam, and myself will be able to put the old hooker along in great shape.”

“How is your head?”

“I declare I had forgotten all about that blow. My skull is very thick, and the events which have followed so rapidly on each other’s heels have put it out of my mind entirely, so we can safely say it was n’t anything very serious. Get me what you can in the way of bandages; tear up one of the sheets if necessary.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Bart, the man who acted as spokesman for the mutineers, is badly wounded in the knee, and I am going to try to patch him up. Does Bean know we are in possession of the little craft once more?”

“He could have understood from Sam’s cry of triumph that the recapture had been accomplished.”

Neither of these two spoke concerning the fate of the Manilamen; it was a horrible portion of the tragedy concerning which they did not wish even to think, if it could be avoided.

It was as if Ben feared his sweetheart would broach the subject, and he went below hurriedly.

In a few words he explained to the first officer all that had occurred, and the latter replied, when the story was concluded :

“It is such news as this, sir, that helps a man in my condition along far better than surgeons or medicine ever

could. It's a good job for all hands that those coolies went over the rail, for it will save a lot of trouble. Now, if I was able to do my share of the work — ”

“Don't talk about that. We shall get along all right. It will be a little tough, of course, but while the weather holds good there are three of us to go aloft, even if I don't try to turn the unwounded mutineers to any account.”

“Three, sir ?”

“Yes, I know from past experience that Miss Dunham is as good as a man at the wheel, which leaves Bob, Sam, and myself, as crew. Now, then, Eliphalet,” he added, to the old darkey, who was still crouching in one corner, but had raised himself somewhat on hearing the cheerful tidings which the captain brought, “get up, and go to work ! There's plenty to be done, and we can't have any loafing around when there's no danger. Cook something in the way of breakfast for Mr. Bean, and then get up a hearty meal for the rest of us.”

“Yes, sah, yes, sah, I'se gwine.”

“Get along lively ; this is no time for skulking. The danger is over, and you've had a soft snap of it, so turn to with a will.”

The old darkey raised himself to his feet as a person does who is cramped by remaining long in one position, and ambled out of the room just as Miss Dunham brought the bandages which had been asked for.

Taking them, and seizing the small medicine-chest which belonged to the brig, Ben left the saloon, ascend-

ing the stairway in order to speak with Sam for a moment before performing the surgical duty.

“Is Bart used up pretty bad?” the sailor asked.

“I reckon he ’ll stand good for a hospital a month or two, if his neck is n’t stretched before then, as it ought to be.”

“These ’ere mates of his want to speak with you, sir. Mutineering ain’t sech a pleasant job as was thought it would be, an’ now they’d like to crawl out of the hole they ’ve put themselves into.”

“What is it you ’ve got to say?” Ben asked, sharply, turning to the men who were lying helpless on the starboard side, where they had been packed away like so much merchandise by Sam.

“Is there any show of our squaring things, captain?” one of the sailors asked, humbly. “You ’re short-handed now, an’ we ’d be willin’ to do the work of half a dozen men as long as you should say, on any kind of allowance, if we could mend matters.”

“Do you think murder can be wiped out as readily as that?”

“But we did n’t take a hand in any, sir. It was the coolies as did the killin’. Mr. Bean can tell you that.”

“But you are equally guilty with them; because, unless you had agreed to assist, they would not have attempted to take the brig.”

“I ain’t denyin’ it, sir, nor won’t try to crawl out of what I ’ve done by whinin’; but, if you ’ll only say the word, me an’ my mate ’ll show you that we ’ve got the

makin' of good sailors in us, even if we did let ourselves be towed by the nose."

"We don't ask you to let us wipe the whole thing out by workin'; but only want to help get the brig into port, an' then you shall do with us as you see fit," the second mutineer added.

"I'll talk with you when I come back," Ben replied, and then he hurried away, thinking to himself that it would be advisable to accept this proffered assistance under the circumstances, for he believed he would have nothing to fear from these fellows, after their mutinous plans had so signally failed.

He intended to keep them in suspense a certain time, however, instead of allowing them to see how willing he was to avail himself of their services.

During Ben's life at sea he had had considerable experience in the way of treating wounds, since on every occasion he took advantage of the opportunity to act as amateur surgeon, knowing the practice would one day be valuable to him if he expected ever to become the master of a vessel, and Bart's knee was not in such a serious condition but that he could dress it fairly well.

The sailor remained silent during all the while Ben was working over him, and not a word was spoken until the young captain had concluded his task, when the latter said :

"There, my man, I have fixed you up the best I know how, and it can't be long before we can leave you at Ascension, so I reckon, barring the pain, you won't be much worse off than if we had a surgeon on board."

“ You are countin’ on deliverin’ me up to the authorities, sir ? ”

“ Of course I am. You can’t expect to play this sort of a game, and not pay the fiddler.”

Bart made no reply, and Ben, knowing now that it would be impossible for him to leave his bunk without assistance, went on deck, understanding that the mutineer was as close a prisoner as if he had been bound in Sam’s most approved manner.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHORT-HANDED.

WHEN Ben came out of the forecastle Bob had nearly finished his task of effacing the blood stains.

"You can see, sir, it's just as I said; that kind of colouring won't come out," and he pointed to a dull smudge which could yet be seen on the wood, despite all his efforts to remove it.

"What's the matter with holystoning it?"

"That's what I've been doin', sir, but it has worked down in the grain. Perhaps if I should use the carpenter's adze a few minutes I might chop it out."

"No, you've done well enough. Smear it over with a little cold tar so the young lady won't see it, and let it go at that. Bob, with Mr. Rogers dead, and Mr. Bean so disabled that there's hardly a chance he'll get out of his bunk before this voyage is ended, I look to you and Sam to do the work of half a dozen men."

"And you sha'n't look in vain, sir," Bob replied, grinning with delight at the familiar way in which the captain spoke to him. "You've shown that you know how to command this 'ere brig, even if you're not over an' above old at the business, an' whatsomever comes to our hands that we can do, it's the same as done."

"I believe you, Bob. I am very positive I can put all confidence in you, and intend to do so. Now tell me what you think about letting those able-bodied mutineers turn to and do their duty?"

"What do I think, sir? Why, I think the curs oughter be made to do it if it takes all hands of us to stand behind them with a rope's end."

"You don't exactly understand me. What I mean is: Do you think we can trust them?"

"When it comes right down to that, sir, I wouldn't trust 'em any further than I could sling a cow by the tail; I don't see as there's any cause to do that. Leave 'em to Sam an' me, an' they won't do any more mutineerin' this voyage."

"I have no question of that if they can be left wholly to you and Sam, but of course they must go into the forecastle where Bart is, and there's no knowing what kind of a plot might be hatched up even now."

"I shouldn't be afeered of Bart if I was you, sir, 'cause he's had the heart all took out of him with that 'ere bullet. He never had no great amount of pluck at the best, an' that taste of lead was enough to drive every grain away. Do you count on carrying him any further than Ascension?"

"No; not if the authorities there will take him?"

"It'll be a right good job to get him out of the brig; but at the same time I hold to it he can't do any harm now."

"We'll risk it at all events. Come aft and release these

men, after I've said a word or two to them, and then we'll make some arrangements as to the watches."

It was evident from the expression of Bob's face that he was promising himself no slight amount of amusement in disciplining the mutineers, and he followed the young captain as directed, wagging his head from side to side as if deciding upon exactly the sort of treatment which he would deal out to the culprits who had been confided to his charge.

The two mutineers were watching the young captain's every movement, intently, and appeared to be relieved in mind on learning that he was about to pass upon their case.

"I've decided to give you two a chance at being honest sailormen, once more; for, although you may have told the truth in regard to your willingness to turn to, it don't stand to reason I can put very much dependence on what you say. You are to be released, and must do your best toward helping work the brig into port; but mind, go crooked ever so little, and I'll put you between decks in irons."

"You can count on us, sir," one of the men replied, humbly. "It don't stand to reason you should believe what we say offhand, but give us a chance. We can't do you any harm an' shall do ourselves a power of good by turning to with a will. If I should go to sea for the next hundred years there ain't a man livin' now or would be then, who'd ever catch me in a mess like this agin."

"Very well, you are to have the opportunity. I don't

promise anything more than that. When we arrive in port, if you have done your duty, it will count in your favour. Now, Bob, take off these ropes, and all hands of you set about putting the brig to rights again, for it looks as if a mutinous crew had had control of her a week, instead of only twelve hours."

The old sailor was not at all careful regarding the manner in which he handled the prisoners, and they received many a thump before it was possible for them to rise to their feet once more.

Ben had quelled the mutiny, and was forced now to face the situation, which was far from pleasant.

The brig was less than half manned, unofficered save for the captain, and short of water, while yet at least fifty days from port, even under the most favourable circumstances.

The chance of getting men at Ascension was very slight, as was also that of his being able to borrow hands from passing ships, and Ben realised to the utmost the magnitude of the task before him.

"It looks as if I was starting on my first voyage pretty well, so far as experience is concerned," the young captain said, grimly, to himself. "I have prevented the brig from being captured by the pirates, had her dismasted by a typhoon, run short of water, quelled a mutiny, and must now take her into port with just about crew enough to man the long-boat. There has been sufficient crowded into this half a cruise to make up six ordinary ones, and yet, if I fail now, with everything apparently against me,

it would count as my inexperience. It seems pretty tough ; but I suppose it 's the way of the world."

Miss Dunham met him at the foot of the companion-way stairs.

"Are you through with your work in the forecastle ?" she asked.

"For to-day, yes."

"Is the man hurt badly ?"

"He did n't get as much as he deserved ; but enough to hold him where he is for a month or more."

"Do you think you can find more sailors at Ascension ?"

"It is very doubtful, and that 's exactly what I have come to talk with you about," Ben replied, as he drew her more closely to his side. "You have been a captain's daughter, and, if I understand the position of affairs correctly, have promised to be a captain's wife. Is that true ?"

For reply she raised her face to his, and it can readily be understood how the young sailor concluded this portion of the contract.

"Now what does such a conversation as this lead up to ?" she asked, laughingly, disengaging his arm from her waist.

"Well, in course of time it will lead up to an appointment with a clergyman ; but just now I am about to make a more unpleasant proposition. I am allowing that we shall not find any men at Ascension ; but be forced to work the brig into the home port short-handed as we are."

"Do you think that can be done ?"

“It must be, no matter what difficulties may stand in the way. Regardless of the many disasters which have overtaken us, and could not be foreseen by the most prudent shipmaster, I am bound to get the brig into port in good condition, or never expect to have command of another craft.”

“What does my being married to a captain have to do with it?”

“Very much; for during the daytime, in fair weather, when it is necessary for me to be forward doing the work of a sailor, I shall ask you to spell the men at the wheel, in order that they may get some rest.”

“Why do you think it is necessary to ask me? You know very well I shall insist on doing my portion of the work, and at such times as it is possible for me to stand at the wheel I intend to take my regular trick.”

“I neither expect nor intend that you shall do anything of the kind. There will be days when it will ease up on us very decidedly to have your assistance, and then I shall call on you.”

“And we are to continue the voyage, whether you find sailors at Ascension or not?”

“Most decidedly, yes.”

“Then, instead of working your men to the utmost at first, and exhausting them before they are well started on this last portion of the voyage, suppose I take the wheel now?”

“Not for two or three days yet. You can be of more assistance in caring for poor Bean.”

"But Eliphilet should be able to do that in addition to his own work. If the others on board are to do double or treble duty, he must be forced to perform his share."

"I am afraid it would be more work to force him than to do the labour ourselves."

"Then leave him to me; I'll see that he hasn't any spare time to trouble him."

"Very well," Ben replied, laughingly, as he repeated the caress. "You shall have full charge of him, and if he turns rusty on your hands let me know."

"There's no danger of that," Miss Dunham replied, stepping aside quickly, as Ben would have continued the love-making. "Suppose you go in and talk with Mr. Bean a few moments? I know he is anxious to hear of your plans in detail."

Ben did as she suggested, and while he was below the steward took it upon himself to perform an act of charity, without being prompted.

Bob was standing near the galley, surveying the deck fore and aft, as if going over again in his mind the closing scenes of the mutiny, when old Eliphilet put his woolly head out of the door, looked carefully around to make certain there was no one save the sailor in the immediate vicinity, and then went through a series of the most extraordinary contortions.

"What's come over that lump of blackness?" Bob muttered, gazing about, curiously, in the belief that the darkey had seen something blood-curdling at the very least.

Eliphilet continued the singular gestures, and after a

few moments it dawned upon the sailor's mind that the old man was inviting him to enter the galley.

"Looks like as if you'd been taken mighty bad," he said, as he approached the steward. "Have n't you got over the scare yet?"

"I'se 'lowin' you 'se done gone made a mistake ef you reckon I was skeered while de shootin' was goin' on. I des staid wid de fust mate."

"Yes, an' a precious deal of good you must have done him. When I saw you there you was curled up in one corner like a sick kitten what was waitin' fur a fit to come on. But what's crawlin' on you now?"

"I des wanted to arsk which one ob de men was it, what done gone got shot in de fo'castle?"

"Oh, you mean Bart, I reckon."

"Am he used up mighty bad?"

"Well, it 'll be a decent long while afore he can do much hornpipe dancin', an' now the captain's got him done up in cloth enough to make the brig a maintopsail. I reckon he's kinder tied down in one place. It would a' been a good job for him, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin', if he'd followed the coolies over the rail."

"Am he ferocious?"

"What?"

"Am it safe to go whar he be? I'se des ben makin' de mate sum brof, an' ef he's done gone got hurted bad, it seems like as ef it would n' be more 'n Christian charity ter feed him up a bit."

"Oh, if that's the course you're steerin', go ahead,

you need n't be afraid of his doin' you any harm, an' I reckon a panikin of soup would go down his throat mighty handy."

"Would you be so kind, sah, as to des take it — "

"Not a bit of it!" Bob interrupted, angrily. "After I've been dodgin' bullets an' knives for the last two watches, owin' to that villain, I don't count on turnin' to and playin' the nuss for him."

"But — "

"There's no use talkin' 'bout it, uncle, so we won't say anything more;" and Bob walked rapidly away as the most effectual method of putting an end to the conversation.

Eliphilet remained hidden from view in the galley at least ten minutes, and then he could have been seen hurrying toward the forecastle with a basin of steaming liquid, which gave forth a most appetizing odour.

In fear and trembling he descended the forecastle ladder, gave one nervous glance at the wounded mutineer in the bunk, and then held toward him the basin at arm's length.

"What is it?" Bart asked, wonderingly.

"I des brung some ob de soup, wha' de cap'n done order fur de mate, kase its good fur sick folks."

"And you're afraid to come near me with it, eh? Do you think I'm sich a hard case that I'd put a knife inter a man what was tryin' to do me a favour?" Bart asked, bitterly.

"I'se in 'er hurry, an' dat's why I could n' stop," Eliph-

alet replied, approaching a few paces nearer the bunk. "De cabin dinner mus' be cooked afore eight bells am struck."

"Was you ever afraid of me before?" Bart asked, as he held out his hand for the basin.

"Dere nebber was any reason fur it."

"And I wish the captain had put a bullet through my fool head before I ever gave any one a reason," Bart said, with a sigh. "I've allers held myself honest as sailors go, till now, an' I've got so far the other side by follerin' in the wake of them yellow devils that even a nigger is afraid of me. I suppose it won't do any harm if I thank you?"

"Des drink it down, honey, an' don't tork 'bout de res'," old Eliphilet replied, gaining confidence as the mutineer showed such evident signs of repentance. "I'se gwine to fix you a mess fur dinner, an' it's time I was toddlin' inter de galley."

Bart raised the basin to his lips, and before it was removed the old darkey had disappeared.

Mr. Bean and Ben decided, while the latter was in the invalid's room, that since there were but four men to be divided into two watches, Bob should take one of the mutineers with him, and Sam the other.

This would give them little or no opportunity for hatching any evil plans, although it was questionable whether either of the watches would be off duty very long at a time.

It would be necessary Ben should stay on deck during

all the hours of darkness, and such portion of the daytime as would be unfit for Miss Dunham to remain in charge, for she was now to be installed chief mate of the brig.

When the young captain came on deck again one of the mutineers was at the wheel, and the other three men had concluded the work of cleaning the ship.

The day was as fair as it well could be.

There was no necessity a rope should be started in order to keep the little craft on her course, although Ben decided all the light sails must be furled before night; and the three men forward were enjoying themselves in true sailorly fashion, as if no such thing as mutiny or murder had ever been known on board the *Progressive Age*.

Standing on the break of the quarter-deck Ben could hear Bob explaining to Sam, as he smoked his pipe, why the voyage thus far had been a disastrous one.

"You see, matey, it was jest like this," the old sailor said, emphasising the words with the stem of his pipe. "When this 'ere bloomin' hooker left port there was on board, countin' the young miss, jest thirteen. Now it kinder struck me at the time that we was goin' clean agin luck to sail with that number; but how was a forecastle hand to make any change in the captain's plans? He was jest bound to go ahead 'cordin' to orders, an' what was the result? That you all know, I reckon, so there's no need of figgerin' it up. It was all along of that 'ere thirteen what brought the trouble on us."

"Well, then, 'cordin' to your idees," Sam said, "we oughter slip right along without any bother, seein's how

we've lost four—poor Mr. Rogers, Freeman, an' the scoundrelly coolies."

"I allow it won't be anything more 'n child's play to get this 'ere brig inter port now. Why, us four can do it easier than a full crew could at the start, an' she'll slide along from this out till one of us has to stand below pourin' water on the keel to keep it from bein' sot on fire through friction."

Superstitious as the old sailor was, Ben was yet more so, for he fancied that hearing this prophecy at the time when he had just fully decided to take the ship home short-handed, was an augury of good, and, foolish as it may sound, it gave him decided relief of mind.

By this time old Eliphilet had so far recovered as to have cooked dinner, and placed the long-delayed meal upon the cabin table.

Ben went below in answer to the summons, and he and Miss Dunham were the only occupants of the saloon, for the steward had been sent back to the galley in order to serve food to the men, two of whom were sadly in need of it, and those were Bob and Sam, who, being shut up in the saloon, had had nothing to eat since the night previous.

If Miss Dunham felt any forebodings as to the conclusion of the voyage, she did not allow Ben to suspect anything of the kind; but discussed the work which it would be necessary to perform, the time which must elapse before they could reach the home port, and the probability of reasonably good weather during the remainder of the voyage.

Then, when the meal was ended, and Mr. Bean sleeping quietly in his room, she insisted on being allowed to take her trick at the wheel in order that the helmsman might be released for a short time.

Ben followed her on deck, and there, where the absence of so many men spoke eloquently of the tragedy which had occurred, they naturally fell to discussing the exciting incidents which had been experienced.

"Of course the Manilamen were the instigators of the mutiny," Miss Dunham said, as the helmsman went forward to join his mates around the mess-kids, "and surely they knew nothing of navigation, so it puzzles me to make out what they intended to do in case of success."

"I reckon that is a question they could n't answer if they were on board to hear you ask it. The only decent thing they have done in the whole business was to drown themselves, for if they were here now they would be a constant source of anxiety. I should never feel safe with those fellows, no matter how heavily they were ironed."

"Did n't Bart tell you what their plans were?"

"I never asked him."

"But he seems repentant?"

"Yes, I fancy he is, because he knows what awaits him when we reach port."

"Why don't you question him now he's in a proper frame of mind?"

"Well, as a matter of fact I haven't much curiosity about it; but if you are interested I will do so at once while there is a good opportunity."

“I wish you would.”

Ben would have gone much farther than the forecastle to have gratified any desire of his sweetheart's, and started at once.

Bart was just finishing the basin of soup brought by old Eliphilet, when the captain descended the ladder into the dingy place occupied by the crew.

“How are you feeling now?” Ben asked.

“Better than I've got any right to, an' a good deal better than I should if I'd mutinied against some other captains I know of.”

“I don't want you to get in the way of thinking I am a safe man to play any such games with, for you haven't got to the end of the thing yet,” Ben said, gravely.

“I understand all that, sir, an' you've treated me like a white man by tyin' up my leg, for that's more'n I'd have got in a good many ships.”

“Look here, my lad, if you think you've got any cause for gratitude, I want you to show it now by giving me the full details of this mutiny.”

“I'm willin' to tell you everything I know, sir,” was the prompt reply.

“Very well, begin by explaining what the coolies idea was of getting the brig into St. Helena?”

“They allowed that if she had put in there for water, it would be a job that would last a couple of days, and the first night after comin' to an anchor them in the cabin was to be overpowered an' robbed. Then it was a case of

takin' to one of the small boats an' headin' for the gold coast."

"Did they count on making it in the boat?"

"Isdra claimed it could be done."

"But why did you think there was anything on board worth stealing which could be carried away?"

"It was Isdra again, sir. He said you took treasure on at Macao, belongin' to the owner."

"Well, I 'll tell you for your satisfaction, my man, that outside of what little money the mates and I had in our pockets — probably not over two hundred dollars all told, — there was n't a cent's worth aft, that could have done you any good whatever. Was it Isdra who wasted the water?"

"He helped it along, sir, after the casks burst."

"Why was n't he satisfied to carry the same scheme into execution when we should put into Ascension?"

"'Cause there were some friends of his at St. Helena, an' he counted on takin' them with us to the gold coast. And now I don't expect you to believe me, captain, yet it is true, them fellers agreed solemnly with us what went inter the job, that there was no blood to be spilled. When the attack was made on the mates I knew no more about it than you did at the moment."

"Who killed Freeman?"

"Isdra, sir, an' when the rest of us would have drawn back 'cause he had gone further than was agreed on, he threatened us with his revolver, an', after what had happened, we knew he would n't hesitate to kill us any

more 'n he had the mates. It was a question of goin' into a scheme to rob the brig, sir, an' findin' ourselves in a reg'lar murderin' scrape. That's God's truth, sir, whether you believe it or not."

The man spoke so earnestly that Ben could not fail to believe him, but he made no comment whatever upon the confession.

After examining the bandages to make sure they were yet in place, he returned to Miss Dunham with the story the mutineer had told him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ASCENSION.

WHEN night came the little brig was snugged down so that her small crew could readily reduce the canvas in case of a decided and sudden change in the weather, and all hands believed they would be able to make the run to Ascension, short-handed as they were, without any excessive labour.

As a matter of course each of the four men understood that it was necessary for him to do the work of at least two able-bodied seamen, and was perfectly satisfied that such should be the case,— the mutineers, because they wanted to retrieve themselves in some slight degree, and Bob and Sam, because of the admiration they felt for the young captain in the plucky fight he was making against adverse circumstances.

The entry in the captain's journal for Saturday, January 12th, the day after the mutineers were vanquished, reads :

“ The day begins with light trades, smooth sea, and fine weather.
4 P. M. The trades freshened, and the day ends fair.”

Sunday and Monday the record of the voyage is virtually the same.

It seemed as if the elements, which had been conspiring

against the little brig, were now working in her favour, and more than once during these three days which elapsed before making Ascension Island, did Bob state as his positive conviction that it was all owing to the fact that there was no longer on board the fatal number of thirteen persons.

From the time the young captain regained possession of his vessel until the 15th of the month, it was not necessary to start a single rope, the trade-winds carrying her steadily onward, until at half-past five on the afternoon of Tuesday, Ascension appeared east, one-half north, distant twenty-five miles.

Darwin describes the island as follows :

“A solitary island in the Atlantic Ocean, in latitude $70^{\circ} 56'$ S. and longitude $14^{\circ} 24'$ W. about seven and one-half miles in length, and six in breadth, with an area of thirty-four square miles, and within the immediate influence of the southeast trade-wind. The whole character of the island is volcanic, and its surface is broken into mountains, hills, and ravines. The chief productions of the island are green vegetables. Ascension has long been noted for the abundance of turtle and turtle eggs found on its shores, the season lasting from December to May or June. The coasts abound with a variety of fish of excellent quality. The island was discovered by the Portuguese navigator, Juan de Nora, on Ascension day, 1501; but remained uninhabited till after the arrival of Napoleon at St. Helena (1815), when it was taken possession of by the British Government. The garrison, with their retainers, resided in George Town, on the northwest coast, which is abundantly supplied with fresh water from a magnificent cistern capable of containing 1700 tons of water, supplied by means of iron pipes from springs, in the Green Mountain, six miles distant, which were reached by boring, in

1830. Ascension is found useful as a station and rendezvous for the vessels employed on the coasts of Africa and Brazil; and letters were formerly often left by passing ships in a crevice in one of the rocks."

With Miss Dunham at the wheel the brig was hauled around for the land, and by nine o'clock in the evening she lay with her main-yard to the mast, awaiting a visit from the harbour-master, who came twenty minutes later.

He was much too cautious a man to venture on board without first knowing the condition of the crew, as to health, and, to the no slight mystification of Ben, mutely extended a pair of tongs as he stood on the thwart of his boat, which was held under the brig's quarter by the oarsman.

"Well, that's a trick ahead of me," Ben said, laughingly. "I wonder what the old chap's driving at now?"

"He wants your papers," Miss Dunham said. "When I was in here with father he went through the same manœuvres."

"Why don't he come aboard and look at them like a civilised being?"

"Hand them down to him, and you'll soon find out."

Ben did as she suggested, and the cautious official fumigated them carefully with sulphur before venturing to open them, Ben, in the meanwhile, carrying on a conversation with him, which was frequently interrupted by a fit of sneezing on the part of one or the other as the fumes of sulphur assailed them.

"What is our chance of picking up two or three men here?" the young captain asked.

"Mighty poor just now. I don't believe there's a sailor in port but what has a tassel to his handkerchief, and that's equal to saying there are none ready to ship."

"Then there are some here?"

"I couldn't say as to that; but I'll go bail, if there are any, you'll have trouble to get them aboard."

"Can I find a surgeon at this time of night?"

"I reckon so. What's the matter?"

"A Manilaman cut the mate pretty badly four days ago, and I'd like a surgeon to see him, although I'm not certain there's any real necessity for it."

"I reckon you can find Dr. Bray without any difficulty. Keep those two tall trees in range, over there on the eastern point, and you'll have good anchorage in seven fathoms."

By this time the brig's papers had been freed from all taint of disease, in case they had ever been so infected, and a brief investigation of them was sufficient to show that there was nothing to prevent the officials allowing the little craft to come to an anchor.

Miss Dunham remained at the wheel.

Ben gave his orders, and obeyed them at the same time, until the brig was in the position designated, when one anchor was let go.

Bob was forward while the young captain stood on the quarter-deck, and as the vessel began to swing the sailor shouted:

"The chain has parted, sir, with thirty fathoms out?"

"Let go your gaskets and foretopsails!" Ben shouted, as he sprang forward, crying to his "chief mate," "Hard down your helm."

For a few moments all was confusion.

The brig was rapidly drifting down on the reef, which extended a quarter of a mile from the easternmost point of the harbour, and even had there been a full crew on board, matters would have been no less dangerous, for the four sailors and the captain worked as possibly they never had done before, after which they could only stand by to wait until time should show whether she was swinging clear of the frowning rocks.

During ten minutes disaster seemed inevitable; then the light winds carried the brig safely beyond the threatening reef, and, with hardly a fathom to spare, she bounded away into the darkness of night from the haven where it had been hoped she would receive the necessary addition to her crew and stores.

"Are you not going to put about?" Miss Dunham asked, anxiously, as the moments passed, and Ben stood on the quarter-deck in silence.

"That's exactly what I am considering now."

"Considering? Why, there's no question about it, is there?"

"I'm not so certain. It will take us all night to work back, and, short-handed as we are, I doubt if it can be done in that time. We run the risk of fooling around here two or three days, and then putting the little craft on the rocks after all."

"But are you seriously thinking of continuing the voyage?" Miss Dunham asked, in alarm.

"I am," Ben replied, more decidedly than she had ever heard him speak to her before.

"Short of water?"

"We shall be able to catch some. Thirty-six hours won't go by without showers, and some spare canvas slung amidships would soon catch enough to fill every cask on board."

"But you have only four men."

"Counting you and myself, we are six."

"Could you expect to reach port with that number?"

"I shall have to try, even if we stay around here two or three days working into Ascension, for the harbourmaster was positive there were no sailors to be had there. Counting the time it would take us to come to an anchorage, saying nothing of the great amount of labour necessary, we shall be five days nearer New York by filling away on the true course now, and, after all, could gain, by stopping, only the water which I am positive we shall get from the heavens before the stock is seriously reduced. You must remember there are now four mouths the less to drink it."

Miss Dunham was silent.

To her it seemed almost foolhardy to continue the voyage under such circumstances, and while she could advise when he asked her opinion, she did not think it proper, whatever their relations might be, to say the slightest word in opposition to his announced intention.

Hurriedly Ben ran over the situation in his own mind, the chances for and the chances against his doing as he proposed, and before five minutes had elapsed he was decided.

"Lads," he said, addressing the men who were standing amidships wondering why the brig was not put about, "there's no chance of our getting sailors at Ascension, and every reason to believe we shall have water in plenty before two days more have passed, for in these latitudes we sha'n't be long without rain, and I ask if you are willing to help me work the brig, few in numbers as we are?"

"We're bound to do as you think best, sir," Bob replied, after waiting a few seconds to learn whether Sam had any remark to make. "If you think it's a venture with any show of safety, why, say the word an' we're standin' by."

"Then we'll put about on our course. There would be too much labour required to make Ascension, with not enough at the end to warrant the expenditure of time and strength. If there was a show of adding to the crew, I would hold on for running in, however much time we might spend; but so long as there is n't, I believe it best for the safety of all that we point the old hooker's nose toward a home port once more."

"We can trust you, captain," Sam said, emphatically, and while the two mutineers made no remark, their actions showed that they were perfectly willing to do anything which lay in their power, at however great a risk.

Miss Dunham remained at the wheel until the brig was put on her true course again, and then, at the positive command of Ben that she go below and turn in, she retired to the cabin.

It was necessary she should speak to the invalid, who by this time was getting along very much more comfortably than had been anticipated, and in answer to his questions she explained what had been decided upon, asking in conclusion :

“ Do you think it will be possible to get the brig into port in her condition ? ”

“ Not only possible, but more than probable,” Mr. Bean replied, very decidedly. “ Captain Thompson is a man who can do an enormous amount of work, and if I was only able to perform my part, and allow him to get his necessary share of sleep, I should have no hesitation in saying that the best thing he could do would be to give Ascension the go-by.”

“ I can help him very much while it is fair,” the young girl said. “ But in case we should get a series of squalls, such as we have had, I tremble for the result.”

“ But we are not likely in this latitude to have any such weather, so on that score you may set your mind at rest. The most you can do to help just now will be to follow his orders implicitly, get all the sleep you can to-night, so that he may be able to turn in to-morrow.”

“ Is there nothing more I can do for you ? ”

“ Nothing ; and if there should be, old Eliphilet can attend to me. Since you have taken him in hand he has

done more work, I'll venture to say, in three days than he ever did in three weeks."

Then the "chief mate," feeling a heaviness of heart at the prospect before them, retired to her room, and on the deck the young captain paced to and fro, questioning in his own mind, now when it was too late to retract from the position he had taken, whether or no he was acting wisely in thus attempting what his father would unquestionably have said was a reckless piece of work.

Since the mutiny, Ben, as a matter of course, had been on deck during all the hours of darkness, therefore this first night after leaving Ascension was nothing new in the way of work, and even had it been he would not have felt any undue amount of fatigue, owing to the anxiety which beset him now he was fully committed to the scheme of making the home port with no officers and only four sailors.

Until after having left Ascension, he had hoped for unusually fair weather; but now his one desire was for rain, and he was perfectly willing it should come with an accompaniment of wind, rather than not at all.

It was destined, however, he should not be called upon to pay such a price for water, and it might have proven an extravagant one had the downfall brought with it a hurricane.

Before midnight clouds began to gather in the sky; the wind did not increase perceptibly, and the sea was running smoothly, so that the little brig remained almost on an even keel.

Bob was on duty at the time, and the young captain said to him :

“ The water we need is coming, my lad, and is well worth arousing all hands for. While matters hold as they are we can catch every drop that falls inboard. Call Sam and his mate, and sling as much spare canvas as you can. If these clouds fulfil their promise we shall have a full allowance before morning.”

“ And they will, sir ; there’s no question about it,” the old sailor replied, with a sage look at the sky. “ I allow the water part of our trouble has pretty nigh come to an end, and it’s all owin’ to the luck of gettin’ rid of thirteen. If it was no more than them yeller villains what have gone to Davy Jones’s locker, an’ Mr. Bean was all right, I’d say the mutiny was a precious good job.”

“ Do you really believe in such nonsense as that the number thirteen brings bad luck ? ”

“ Do I believe it ? How can I help it ? Look at it yourself, sir. We had a full complement of men on board, an’ everything in plenty. What was the result ? Why things were going wrong end foremost all the time, with a mutiny to top it off. Then we get reduced to nine, an’ see how comfortable-like we’re workin’ ! ”

Ben did not attempt to persuade the man he was wrong in being thus superstitious, for it suited him well that the few sailors he had at his command should believe the fates were with them.

His orders were executed promptly, for the crew were eager to have a full allowance of water once more, and

when the rain descended, gentle and copious as a summer shower, there was a sufficient amount of canvas spread to catch as much as filled every spare cask on board.

Ben remained at the wheel, and the men had nothing to do save take in the needed supply and store it away.

“It’s done, sir,” Bob cried, cheerily, before the shower had ceased. “We’ve filled every blessed cask, and did so easier than if we’d fooled ‘round tryin’ to bring it from on shore.”

The men, when admitted to the confidence of the captain, as would never have been the case if a full complement of sailors had been on board, assumed a familiar manner of speaking, which Ben would not have countenanced under other circumstances; but now that it was essential that each should exert himself to the utmost, even beyond his strength, the young captain believed he could accomplish more by putting aside the dignity which the commander of a ship necessarily assumes.

Miss Dunham came on deck shortly after sunrise, and said to Ben, as she insisted on taking her station at the wheel :

“I am afraid something is the matter with old Eliph-
alet.”

“What causes you to have any such fear as that?”

“He has got the idea in his head that we have all the water aboard we need. He told me your orders were, the full allowance of three gallons should be given out; he insisted you said so.”

“And that is right. We are now well supplied.”

“Did you put back to Ascension last night?”

“Not by any manner of means. Good water came on board just the same, and with precious little work.”

Then Ben explained what had been done while she was asleep, saying, as he concluded a recital of the incidents of the night :

“Bob insists we had no luck because there were thirteen aboard; but that now everything will go along smoothly.”

“It does begin to look like it,” the young girl said, as if surprised that she had never thought of such a thing before.

“Figure it out in any way to suit yourself, so long as we have plenty to drink,” Ben replied, merrily, and then he saluted his “chief mate” in what he considered a proper and sailorly fashion, regardless of the fact that the watch on deck could see his every movement.

“We have certainly been fortunate, and, although I was doubtful yesterday as to the wisdom of attempting to continue the voyage, I am beginning to believe we shall conclude it in safety.”

“And I pray you may be correct in your belief,” Ben replied, gravely, “for success now means to me more than it ever did, since, unless I remain captain of a ship, I can never ask a captain’s daughter to marry me, however willing she may be to sacrifice herself.

“It has not yet been shown to me that a captain’s daughter would sacrifice herself by marrying a man she cared for, even if he did not chance to occupy a higher

position than that of mate," Miss Dunham replied, with a merry laugh, and at this moment old Eliphilet broke in upon the conversation, which had grown interesting to two at least, with the announcement that breakfast was served.

CHAPTER XIX.

SIGNALING.

BEFORE partaking of the morning meal Ben looked in upon the wounded mate, and found him decidedly more comfortable than might have been expected.

"I am getting along first-class," Mr. Bean said, "and even surprise myself. I never supposed a man could receive such a slashing as I got without mortal injury, yet it must be that the coolie's creese failed to do more than inflict a flesh wound."

"I think we can safely say you are on the fair road to recovery," Ben added, cheerily, for the knowledge that Mr. Bean was in such a wonderfully good bodily condition caused the difficulties of the situation to seem much less than on the night previous.

Then the young captain told of the method by which the supply of water had been replenished, and proposed he exercise what little surgical skill he possessed in sewing up the wound, but to this proposition the mate objected.

"There's no question but that it's healing, and I count on being moved in three or four days at the longest."

"Want to get into the cabin, eh?" Ben said, laughingly.

"No, sir. My desire is to be on deck. If I can stay

there, even though it be necessary to remain sitting, it will relieve you just so much, and that is of great importance to us all."

"We won't waste our time talking about that," the young captain replied. "It will be enough if your life is saved without thinking of what you might be able to do toward working the brig."

Although Ben had dismissed the matter so lightly, he was thinking very seriously of what the mate had said, for with Mr. Bean able to move around, even though he could perform no hard labour, the work of running the brig would be materially lessened, so far as he was concerned.

With this thought in his mind, and the knowledge that there was no longer any danger of suffering from thirst, the young captain was a very cheerful companion, and Miss Dunham was not a little surprised that he should be able so quickly to throw off the cares which had beset him.

"You are feeling decidedly better than when I left the deck last night," she said, as he gave proof of his lightness of heart by laughing at a mistake which old Eliphilet made in serving the food.

"And, indeed, I have good cause to be. In the first place I am sitting opposite the dearest little woman in the world, whom I have good reason to believe has a certain amount of affection for this graduate from the forecastle. Then again, we accomplished in two or three hours, without labour, all that could have been done by running into Ascension, and our invalid is getting along finely. The

weather is as favourable as it possibly could be ; the men are willing, and it begins to look as if the *Progressive Age* would reach port despite all the dangers which have threatened."

"Have you seen Bart this morning?"

"No ; but Sam tells me he is resting comfortably. I fancy if the fear of what is to follow when we reach port was removed from his mind he would be around very speedily."

"I believe him to be thoroughly repentant."

"There's no question about that."

"And shall you deliver him up to the authorities as soon as we arrive?"

"I don't see any other way out of it. I must make my report, and although I am convinced he was telling me the truth when he said the agreement was that no blood should be spilled, he has been engaged in a mutiny, which cost four lives, therefore must be punished."

"And the other two men?"

"Suppose we don't talk of this just now," Ben replied. "They are turning to like tigers in the effort to work the brig, and I don't like to think they are doing all this simply to find themselves in jail immediately after our arrival."

"But you can't let them off lightly, and leave Bart to suffer all the punishment. One is as guilty as the other."

"Yes, and that's what troubles me just now. There is no need to cross a bridge till you get to it," and Ben put an end to the conversation by going on deck.

Miss Dunham followed him to take her trick at steering, and the same trade-wind which had brought them thus far from St. Helena continued to blow with unvarying force, therefore, after the men had broken their fast, all hands, except the helmsman, had ample opportunity for rest.

Miss Dunham insisted that the young captain go into his room and get some sleep, promising he should be called whenever there was the slightest indication of a change in the weather, and until noon the little craft dashed on merrily through the waters, as if to give promise to the remnant of her crew that she would bear them safely to port without further troubles or mishaps.

About an hour before noon Miss Dunham called Sam to relieve her at the wheel, while she went first to visit Mr. Bean and then to the forecastle.

The mate reported himself as "improving each moment," and the mutineer was much in the same condition.

"You are very good, miss, to ask about a man who has done what I have," he said, after replying to her questions, "and whatever happens to me when I get ashore, I shall never forget your kindness. How I could ever let them murderin' coolies pull me into such a job, is more'n I can figger out."

"It is best not to trouble your head over such matters now," Miss Dunham replied, gently. "You want to bend all your energies to getting well, so you can assist the others in working the brig."

“If I hadn’t let myself be drawn into the villainy by the stories told of gold to be found on the coast of Guinea, I should n’t be layin’ here with a bullet-hole in my knee, nor would the little brig be short-handed.”

“That is very true; but since it has all happened, there is nothing left for you but to repent having been so wicked.”

“That I do most sincerely, miss, but I’m afraid if I say too much about it the captain will think I’m a whinin’. I’ve seen old shellbacks put on church-goin’ airs, when they got into a scrape, an’ never thought half so much of them as if they had stood up like men, an’ taken the dose they’d earned. Now I bought my medicine, an’ am goin’ to swallow it without makin’ up a face.”

“Get well as soon as you can, and then do everything possible toward working the brig into port. It will count a great deal in your favour, and it may be that things will not be as bad for you as they now look,” Miss Dunham replied, cheerily, for she pitied the man, even though he had proved himself to be such a villain.

“I only hope the captain will give me a chance, an’ I’ll come out of this place as soon as it is possible for me to step.”

“You shall have all the opportunity to prove you are sorry for the part taken in the mutiny. It has cost the lives of four men, and—”

“It was only the coolies who are responsible, miss. I want you an’ the captain to believe what I told him last

night, that me an' my mates joined in the scheme only after the understanding that there would be no killin' done. We would have left the brig in bad condition, if our plans had worked, but God knows murder was n't a part of them."

"I believe you, and so does the captain, I think. You can yet be of a great deal of assistance during this voyage, therefore do your best to repay Captain Thompson for his kindly treatment of you since the brig has been retaken," Miss Dunham said, as she scrambled, not ungracefully, up the forecastle ladder, and left the repentant mutineer calling down blessings upon her head.

It was necessary Ben should be summoned shortly before noon, in order to take an observation, and when eight bells was made the brig was found to be in latitude $5^{\circ} 27'$ south, longitude $18^{\circ} 39'$ west.

Just at the hour of noon Bob sighted a sail far down on the horizon to the northward, evidently steering directly toward them, and Ben himself went aloft with the glass to scan the on-coming craft.

"She is a full-rigged ship, standing as close to the wind as possible. We'll make our course a little more northerly, in order to speak her," he said to Miss Dunham, when he was on the quarter-deck once more. "Now to overhaul the signal-flags," and, forced to wait upon himself, owing to the shortness of the crew, Ben ran below for the tiny bits of colour with which mariners can communicate their condition and desires.

"How long will it be before you have the chance to use

those?" Miss Dunham asked, as Ben began arranging the signals.

"Three or four hours at the latest."

"Are you certain we shall overhaul her before dark?"

"Yes; unless we do those flags will be useless."

"Are you going below again soon?"

"No, indeed; I've had sleep enough to last me twenty-four hours. But why did you ask?"

"Because, unless you want more rest, suppose you explain to me the meaning of the signals. I have often intended to ask father; but forgot it when he had leisure to talk with me. There's nothing to be done for the brig just now, and surely the chief mate should understand the mystery of signaling."

"It is very simple," Ben replied, "for with the code one who had never seen them could, after some little study, work them as well as an old hand. Now, to begin with, there are eighteen in the International code, which are these," and Ben laid out successively a burgee, four pennants and thirteen square flags.

"But it would take a person very long to study that code," Miss Dunham said, as she looked at the large book with its many printed pages, which Ben opened.

"There's no necessity of having it all at one's finger ends, for you can find, by the same method as in a dictionary, the ordinary sentences you wish to use. In addition to the International code, there is a pennant code, and nearly all the nations of the globe use the two together as set down here."

Then Ben read the following :

Burgee: B — red, swallowtail.

Pennants: C — white, with red spots; D — blue, with white spots; F — red, with white spots; G — yellow-blue, in two vertical stripes.

Square flags: H — white-red, in two vertical stripes; J — blue-white-blue, in three horizontal stripes; K — yellow-blue, in two vertical stripes; L — blue and yellow, in four alternate checks; M — blue, with white diagonal cross; N — blue and white, in sixteen alternate checks; P — blue, with white centre; Q — yellow, quarantine; R — red, with yellow right cross; S — white, with blue centre; P — red-white-blue, in three vertical stripes; V — white, with red diagonal cross; W — blue-white-red, in three borders.

Code pennant: Code signal — Red and white, in five vertical stripes. This code is also utilised as answering signal.

“Now, in case ships are several miles apart, with a heavy sea running, when it would be difficult to read two, three, or four hoisted at the same time,” he said, as he sorted out the bits of bunting once more, “this special code is prepared for single flags. Here are a few of the questions or answers which can be made with them.”

He laid out each square in turn as he read the significance :

B — Ask name of ship or signal station in sight.

C — Yes.

D — No.

F — Repeat signal, or hoist it in a more conspicuous place.

G — Cannot distinguish your flags. Come nearer, or make distance signals.

H — You may communicate by the semaphore, if you please.

J — Stop, or bring to. Something important to communicate.

K — Have you any telegrams or dispatches for me?

L—Want a pilot. Can I have one?

M—Want a tug. Can I have one?

N—What is the meteorological weather forecast?

P—Call attention of signal station in sight.

Q—Vessel asks for orders by telegraph from owner.

R—Report me by telegraph to my owner.

S—Send the following message by telegraph.

T—Send the following message by the signal letters through the telegraph.

“As a matter of course, the signal-flag code is limited,” Ben said, as he prepared to rearrange his flags. “Now, here are some two-flag signals when the burgee must always be uppermost,” and once more he had recourse to the book :

1—Attention or demand; B D meaning, “What ship is that?”

2—B H meaning, “Vessels that wish to be reported all well show your distinguishing signals.”

“That serves to show this especial way of working, and it can be continued to a great many questions or answers; but if we replace the burgee with the pennant the reading is different,” and Ben, observing that his sweetheart was deeply interested, continued the lesson. “If the square flag is raised in the place of the pennant, then again is the meaning changed. There are also three and four-flag signals, which can also be varied according to the code-flag, until, as you see by the number of pages here, a captain can tell another a great deal of news while remaining at a distance. Now here are the most important messages to be flashed across the sea by those bits of bunt-

ing, and ones which every shipmaster should have in his memory, so there would be no necessity of referring to the instructions. They are, as many as I can remember, these," and at each sentence Ben spread out the flags referred to.

H B — Want immediate assistance.

H D — No assistance can be rendered.

H F — We are coming to your assistance.

H J — Boat, or life-boat, cannot come.

H K — Boat in distress.

H L — Do not attempt to land your own boats.

H M — Man overboard.

H T — Damaged mast ; cannot sail.

H V — Damaged rudder ; cannot steer.

H W — Machinery disabled.

J B — Accident ; want a surgeon.

J D — You are standing into danger.

J F — You are in a dangerous position.

J P — Heavy weather coming ; look sharp.

K D — Stand by.

K Q — The channel has altered ; do not try it.

K R — Dangerous without a pilot.

L S — Put to sea at once ; get an offing.

L V — Shift your berth ; your berth is unsafe.

M L — Quit the vessel as fast as possible.

N C — In distress ; want assistance.

N D — I must abandon the vessel.

N F — Do not abandon me.

N G — I am unmanageable.

N H — I am on fire.

N P — Fire gains rapidly ; take people off.

N S — I have sprung a leak.

- N P — Leak gaining rapidly.
- N V — I am sinking.
- P C — Want assistance; mutiny.
- P D — Want immediate assistance.
- P F — Want boat or boats immediately.
- P H — Want food; starving.
- P J — Want coal immediately.
- P K — Want an anchor.
- P S — Want hands.

“This last signal is the one we shall use when the ship is near enough,” Ben said, as he laid the two squares of bunting aside ready for bending on the halliards, “and I reckon your lesson has lasted long enough. After this, with the aid of the code, you should be able to carry on a decently long conversation at sea.”

“It is well to know about such things, even if there is never an opportunity to use one’s knowledge,” Miss Dunham replied, with a laugh. “I’ve come to believe that at sea it is always the unexpected which happens, and one can never make too many preparations.”

“And you are correct there. It seems to me since this voyage began as if you had prepared yourself for very nearly everything. There is precious little in the way of sea happenings that we have n’t had already.”

Eliphalet announced dinner, Bob took the wheel, and the captain and his “chief mate” went below.

Before the two had finished the meal, Bob called down through the skylight to say that the approaching ship was standing off on the long tack, and, unless the brig’s course was speedily changed, the stranger would pass so

far to the eastward of them that it would be impossible to signal.

“Shift your helm to meet her, and run up the ensign, union down,” Ben replied.

“Ay, ay, sir.”

“Do you think you are warranted in setting the distress signal?” Miss Dunham asked, as Bob hurried away to execute the commands, for she had been taught that such a sign should not be made except in the last extremity.

“I don’t know who would be warranted in doing it if we are not,” Ben replied. “No reasonable-minded captain could object to being brought to by a brother master who was as short-handed as we are.”

“It hardly seems likely you will be able to borrow any men from her.”

“That is very true, and yet at the same time there is a chance. They might manage to let me have one, which would help out amazingly just now, when every man of ours is obliged to do the work of three.”

This was the first time Ben had acknowledged there might be any question of making port with the small crew at his command, and Miss Dunham now understood that he had refrained from telling her of all the trouble in his mind.

As a matter of course she understood how difficult, perhaps impossible, it might be to continue the voyage short-handed; but until now she had no idea Ben felt seriously disturbed regarding the result.

The remainder of the meal was eaten hurriedly, and

when the two went on deck, the brig was sailing more to the eastward in order to intercept the stranger, who, with all sail set, was standing on her course.

“Have you seen any sign that they noticed your signal?” Ben asked, and Bob, who was pacing to and fro on the quarter-deck with the air of an officer in command, said :

“No, sir, I reckon we are a little too far away yet. They would n’t be likely to pay much attention to so small a craft as this, seeing ’s how it don’t stand to reason they’re in need of us as we are of them.”

An hour passed, during which time it seemed positive those aboard the ship must have seen the signal of distress, and yet she had continued on the eastward tack, making almost a free wind.

Twice Ben hauled the *Progressive Age* around more easterly after Miss Dunham came to the wheel, and when the course was set so they must intercept the stranger, whether the latter desired it or not, the young girl asked :

“Aren’t you running very far to the eastward?”

“Yes,” Ben replied, impatiently. “If that fellow is such a grump as not to be willing to come up on the wind a little in order to help a fellow out in distress, I ’ll overhaul him whether he likes it or not, even if we lose a day’s time by it.”

At the expiration of another hour, the two vessels had approached so nearly to each other that, by the aid of the glass, it was possible to distinguish clearly the ship’s deck.

Not until he was perfectly satisfied the stranger must

have seen his flag half-masted, did Ben think of doing more than scrutinise her with the naked eye; but now, finding he was receiving no attention whatever, the young captain leveled the glass at the on-coming craft.

One hasty survey, and an exclamation of surprise burst from his lips.

Then he looked again and more steadily, after which he wiped the lenses as if fancying his eyes were playing him some trick, and Miss Dunham asked anxiously :

“What is the matter? What do you see?”

“It is what I don’t see that puzzles me,” the young captain replied, in a tone of perplexity. “Here, take these, and see what you can make out,” Ben added, handing her the glasses, as he relieved her of the care of the wheel.

Miss Dunham obeyed, and cried, an instant later :

“Why I can’t see any one on deck!”

“That was just my case exactly.”

Again the young girl gazed toward the ship, and, as she handed the glasses back to Ben, said, in a tone very like that of fear :

“I am positive there is no one at the helm.”

“So am I,” Ben replied, as he looked again, and then, closing the glasses with a snap, he said impatiently, “There’s the chance of a lifetime, and I am to lose it because I’ve no crew aboard.”

“What do you mean?”

“That ship is a derelict.”

“How is it possible that can be? She is n’t disabled, and is sailing as well as if there was a full crew aboard.”

“That is very true, and yet among the strange things to be met with on the sea, such a case has occurred several times, where a singular accident has happened on a sound craft, causing her master to believe she was about to founder, therefore has abandoned her without ascertaining the true condition of affairs. Now if I had a full crew, I would chase that ship until it was possible to board her, and fancy what a salvage for a young captain! Why it would set you and me up for life!”

“But I never heard of a case of that kind,” Miss Dunham said, musingly.

“Old Short could have told you of one which he had a hand in picking up. He was a second officer on board a small brig hailing from New Bedford, which was dismasted and foundered. All hands took to the boats, and after they had drifted around three or four days, there came a dead calm just at nightfall.

“In the morning they saw, within a mile or so of them, a ship under full sail, becalmed, as a matter of course. They pulled toward her, hailed, and no one answered. Short says some of the men, shipwrecked though they were, and needing the planks of a vessel under their feet as badly as any sailors ever did need them, were so frightened by the fact, that they tried to persuade the others not to board the craft.

“All were not quite so superstitious luckily, and went on board.

“Everything was in the most perfect order, ropes neatly coiled, belaying pins in place, and no litter about

the decks. In the forecastle each bunk had its blankets, and coats and hats were hanging on their hooks. In the cabin, however, were some few evidences of a ransacking. The ship's papers were gone, and not a scrap of writing could be found anywhere. On removing the hatches they learned she was in ballast. She was dry as a bone, well supplied with provisions and water, ropes and braces in perfect order, and not a single man aboard to tell what had happened. All the boats were missing, however, which showed that the crew abandoned her probably through fear. If she had a mutiny, or anything of that kind, the evidences of it must have remained.

"They ran into Rio Janeiro, where she was sold for benefit of the salvors, and was afterwards identified as the ship *Golden Star*, of San Francisco ; but no tidings of her officers were ever heard."

"If you will excuse me, sir," Bob, who had been standing near the captain during the last portion of the story, said, respectfully, "I will tell you of another case ; but in my yarn it was known why the craft was abandoned.

"It was the brig *Equator* from New York for San Francisco, with a cargo of turpentine. One fine mornin' when she was heading about as yonder ship is, there was an explosion that tore off the hatches, and what appeared to be smoke came up out of the hold as if she was afire fore an' aft. The officers and crew did n't lose much time skinnin' out of her, 'cause, owin' to the cargo, you see, they was expectin' another explosion every minute. All hands got over the rail without waitin' for anything, an'

sat there like chumps in the boats, as she filled away an' left them. Two days after she was overhauled by a tramp steamer, an' found to be in first-class condition. They as understands such things say it was a gas from the turpentine collected in the hold, that blew off the hatches, an' when it come out looked like smoke."

"There are several other cases on record of a sound craft being abandoned," Ben replied, "but I don't just remember them now. At all events, we can count on it there's enough in that ship to tassel our handkerchiefs for life, if we could get hold of her; but we can't, so we may fill away on the true course once more."

The little brig was headed toward the home port again, and Ben watched the gallant ship until she seemed hardly more than a cloud in the distance. Then, with a long drawn sigh of regret because of the lost opportunity, he turned away, and Miss Dunham, who had been observing his every movement, said, as he did so :

"A captain who has had such good fortune as to come safely through so many perils should not allow himself to suffer a single pang of disappointment because he cannot take advantage of a chance like that."

"I know it, sweetheart, and yet it is impossible not to consider what the capture of such a craft would mean to you and me."

CHAPTER XX.

THE HOME PORT.

BY the following morning Ben had succeeded in mastering his disappointment, and once more the only thought in his mind was how to carry the brig to her destination.

Mr. Bean was improving rapidly, so much so, in fact, that, despite all previous forebodings and fears that he would not be able to leave his room during the remainder of the voyage, he was out of his bunk on the morning following the sighting of the derelict when Ben and his "chief mate" came below for breakfast.

Miss Dunham was almost alarmed at seeing him in his accustomed place at the table, and Ben said, in a tone of reproof :

"I don't think it was wise, Mr. Bean, for you to do anything as reckless as this. If you had concluded to turn out, you should have called on somebody to assist you, for a relapse now would put you in a worse condition than when the Manilaman first gave you a taste of the knife."

"I did have assistance, sir," Mr. Bean replied, with a smile. "When old Eliphilet came in to see what I wanted for breakfast, I thought it would be a good opportunity to try my strength, and, although I could have

gotten along very well by myself, he assisted me to dress, helped me out, and here I am, feeling, with the exception of an unusual weakness, quite as hearty as ever. I am counting on being able to aid you in the navigation of the brig within the next twenty-four hours."

Ben's delight at seeing his first officer on the fair road to a speedy recovery was so great that he could not remain angry very many moments, however much risk Mr. Bean might have incurred in leaving his room, and it was a jolly party the three made that morning at breakfast.

The first officer would have brought into the conversation the incident of the previous afternoon, but that Miss Dunham checked him before he had well begun, by saying :

"It is best we do not even think of that ship any more, for it only causes regret that we could not save her, and Captain Thompson has troubled his head about it quite as much as is necessary."

"I do not think I should have attempted to overhaul her if I had been master of the brig, no matter how big my crew was."

"Why not?" Ben asked, quickly.

"Because, with all canvas spread she would sail two miles to your one, as soon as the wind freshened, and there's no knowing what sort of water she might lead you into. I hold to it in a case like that the only chance of capturing the derelict is in a dead calm when you can overhaul her with boats."

"That may be," Ben replied, shaking his head slowly;

"but at the same time, if we had been in condition, I should have made a mighty big try for the prize."

The conversation was well started on the subject which Miss Dunham wished to banish, and, in order to turn it before Ben could become very deeply interested, she asked old Eliphilet, in an unusually loud tone, how the wounded sailor was getting along.

"He's perkin' up right smart, missy, an' I 'lows at de rate he's feedin' now, he's jest 'bout gettin' ready for duty. He done tole me for to arsk de cap'n ef he could talk wid Mr. Bean."

"What answer shall Eliphilet make?" and Miss Dunham turned toward Ben.

"I think that is a matter which Mr. Bean had best settle. Bart probably wants to repeat that he joined the mutineers only with the understanding that no murder should be done."

"Is he able to get out of the forecastle?" Mr. Bean asked.

"He 'lowed dat two ob de men would bring him on deck this yere forenoon, sah," Eliphilet replied.

"Then you may tell him that I will come forward if I feel able."

Ben and his first mate thus reminded so forcibly of the mutiny, discussed the incidents of that fatal night until the meal was finished, and it was time for Miss Dunham to take her trick at the wheel.

Two hours later, while the young captain was asleep in his room and the brig sailing steadily on toward her desti-

nation under cloudless skies, the first officer, with the assistance of Eliphilet, went forward to where the repentant mutineer was seated on the deck, leaning against a coil of cable.

During at least thirty minutes the two talked earnestly, and when Mr. Bean came aft to where Miss Dunham stood at the wheel, he said :

“It was as the captain thought. Bart insisted on telling me the story of his connection with the Manilamen, and seemed most anxious I should believe he was at least guiltless of the crime of murder.”

“How is his wound by this time?”

“Healing rapidly. He insists he could remain at the wheel in light weather, and wants permission to relieve you in the future.”

“What does he say in regard to our arriving in port?”

“He expects to be delivered up to the authorities as a matter of course, but his desire to aid in working the ship arises from the fact that he thinks by so doing he shall be benefited when the case comes to trial.”

“And those two men who have been working night and day to expiate their sins,” Miss Dunham said, as she pointed to the mutineers, who were engaged in some trifling duty forward, “must bear the same punishment, I suppose?”

“Of course. They have danced and must pay the piper. Two lives have been taken, and if these men were not directly implicated in the crime, they were concerned in the mutiny which committed it.”



"I cannot believe but that their story is true, and their agreement with the coolies was only to the effect that we should be robbed, and the brig abandoned."

"I fancy there is no question about it. The Manilamen were the murderers, for I saw them kill Rogers, and am positive none of the white sailors were near at the time."

"Then these men will have to suffer for what those fellows did?"

"That is for the court to decide. The worst of it is that the rest of us will be forced to hang around on shore until the case comes to trial, which means no slight loss to a man like me, who depends entirely upon his wages," Mr. Bean said, thoughtfully.

"I wish they could escape before we come to an anchor," Miss Dunham said, half to herself.

Bean looked up quickly, as if about to make some remark, and evidently thinking better of it, replied carelessly :

"So do I; but I suppose it's our duty to see that nothing of the kind happens."

The first officer remained on deck during the entire forenoon, and when, by the positive command of the captain, he finally went below, was feeling so much stronger that he insisted he should resume duty the following morning.

"You can at least let me try it, captain," he said, "and if you find it is likely to do me any serious injury, it won't take very much time or breath to order me below."

It was also decided during this conversation that Bart

should be allowed to assist in whatever way it might be possible, and Bob volunteered to make a crutch for him, which, as he said, would patch him up as well as "a bloomin' mutineer ought to expect."

All this was done as agreed upon, and before the week had come to an end, the brig was being handled, thanks to this addition to her small crew, as well as could be expected.

The weather continued favourable in the highest degree until they were drawing near their destination.

On Sunday, the 17th of February, in latitude $38^{\circ} 55'$ N., and longitude $72^{\circ} 20'$ W., the following entry explains sufficiently the difficulty under which the limited crew laboured, during the forty-six hours preceding their arrival in the home port.

" This day begins with faint airs from southeast, and fine weather, with all sails set. 5 P. M. Fresh breezes from south-southeast, freshening with a falling barometer. At the same time I judged myself to be across the Gulf Stream. 8 P. M. Fresh gales from south to southeast. 10 P. M. Squally, with sharp lightning from the northwest and northeast. Furled royals and flying jib. At midnight glass still falling, and weather very threatening. Furled topgallant-sail. 2 A. M. Wind veered around to the southwest. Single reefed the fore and maintopsails. 5 A. M. Heavy gales from the west, southwest with a very heavy sea on. Close reefed the foretopsail and double reefed the main. 6 A. M. Split foretopmaststaysail. 7 A. M. Reefed thetrysail, and bent a new foretopmaststaysail; furled the jib, and set foretopmast and mainstaysails. Before the foretopsail could be reefed, it split again above the first reef-band. Clear, cold weather with a heavy sea, and the brig behaves like a lady."

It can well be fancied how hard and continuously the little crew must have laboured, before the pleasing knowledge was theirs that they were within a few hours' sail of the home port, and this nerved each man, weary and exhausted though he was, to renewed exertions.

Bart, yet unable to move around save with difficulty and at the expense of considerable pain, obeyed orders as if he had never received any injury, and worked with his two comrades in the mutiny so energetically that the absence of the four men was hardly felt.

Heavy weather continued until at eight o'clock on the morning of Tuesday, February 19th, when a pilot-boat was sighted standing down for the brig, and the voyage was virtually at an end.

Thirty-two hours later the anchor was let go at the quarantine ground in New York Bay, and the voyage of the bark *Progressive Age* had come to an end in one hundred and nine days from the time of her leaving port.

Ben's first voyage was a success, and against most adverse circumstances.

"I have gained my reputation as a sea-captain, and also the dearest little wife in the world," he said, triumphantly, as, when the brig was swinging at her anchors, and the crew engaged in "snugging down," he came into the cabin where Miss Dunham was sitting.

"I congratulate you on the first portion of your success, captain, and can only say that I hope others may have reason to do the same on the second part."

"So far as that is concerned, it is not necessary I should

wait to find out, for I know it already, and now, sweetheart, where do you propose to go?"

"I do not know. Except for you I am alone in the world."

"Then I can settle matters very speedily. We will go to my mother. She will receive you as a daughter, and the day I sail on my second voyage as captain will be the day when you shall be made my wife."

Although the two young people had been together so much, there were many minor points to be decided between them, now that the responsibility of caring for the brig was taken from Ben's shoulders, and they had been conversing fully two hours when Mr. Bean came below.

"The brig is snugged down, sir, and the anchor watch set; but I have to report that the three mutineers, who should have been delivered up to the authorities, have deserted."

"How did that happen?" Ben asked, excitedly.

"I cannot say, sir. The gig was lowered to set the pilot ashore, and while I was busy aft they must have sneaked off in her. Shall I send some one after the boat?"

To have judged from the expression on the first officer's face, one would have said the desertion of the men had taken him wholly by surprise, and that he regretted the occurrence; but Miss Dunham, remembering what she had said to him in regard to her wish that the mutineers might escape, gave him a grateful glance when the captain's attention was directed to another quarter.

"Send for the boat, of course," the young captain said, sharply, "and have Bob follow the fellows. By giving the alarm now they may be captured."

Miss Dunham laid her hand on his arm, as she said, pleadingly :

"Why not wait until to-morrow before reporting their escape? They are thoroughly repentant, and have done everything in their power to help bring the brig into port. What real good will be effected now by punishing them? If they have escaped, and without your connivance, will it not really be better for you?"

Ben hesitated a moment, then seated himself, and said to Mr. Bean :

"You may send for the gig, sir. Perhaps there will be time to make the report to the authorities when we are docked."

Mr. Bean bowed without making any reply, and left the cabin.

At this juncture, while Miss Dunham thanks the young captain for having yielded to her wish, it will be well that we take our leave of them, without prying further into their private affairs.

It was not until a late hour on the following day that the brig was docked, and then, while Ben was making arrangements for sending Miss Dunham ashore to a hotel, his mother, greatly to his surprise, came on board.

She had seen the telegraphic news of the arrival of the *Progressive Age*, and started at once to congratulate her son upon having done that which, in its telling, occupied

the greater portion of the columns of one edition of the daily papers devoted to maritime news.

It was not necessary the captain should ask his mother to receive kindly the orphan whom he expected would soon be his wife.

The young girl was given a loving welcome, for there was no necessity of explaining what had occurred between the two.

After having seen Miss Dunham, and knowing that she had been in her son's charge more than four months, Mrs. Thompson could readily fancy the sequel.

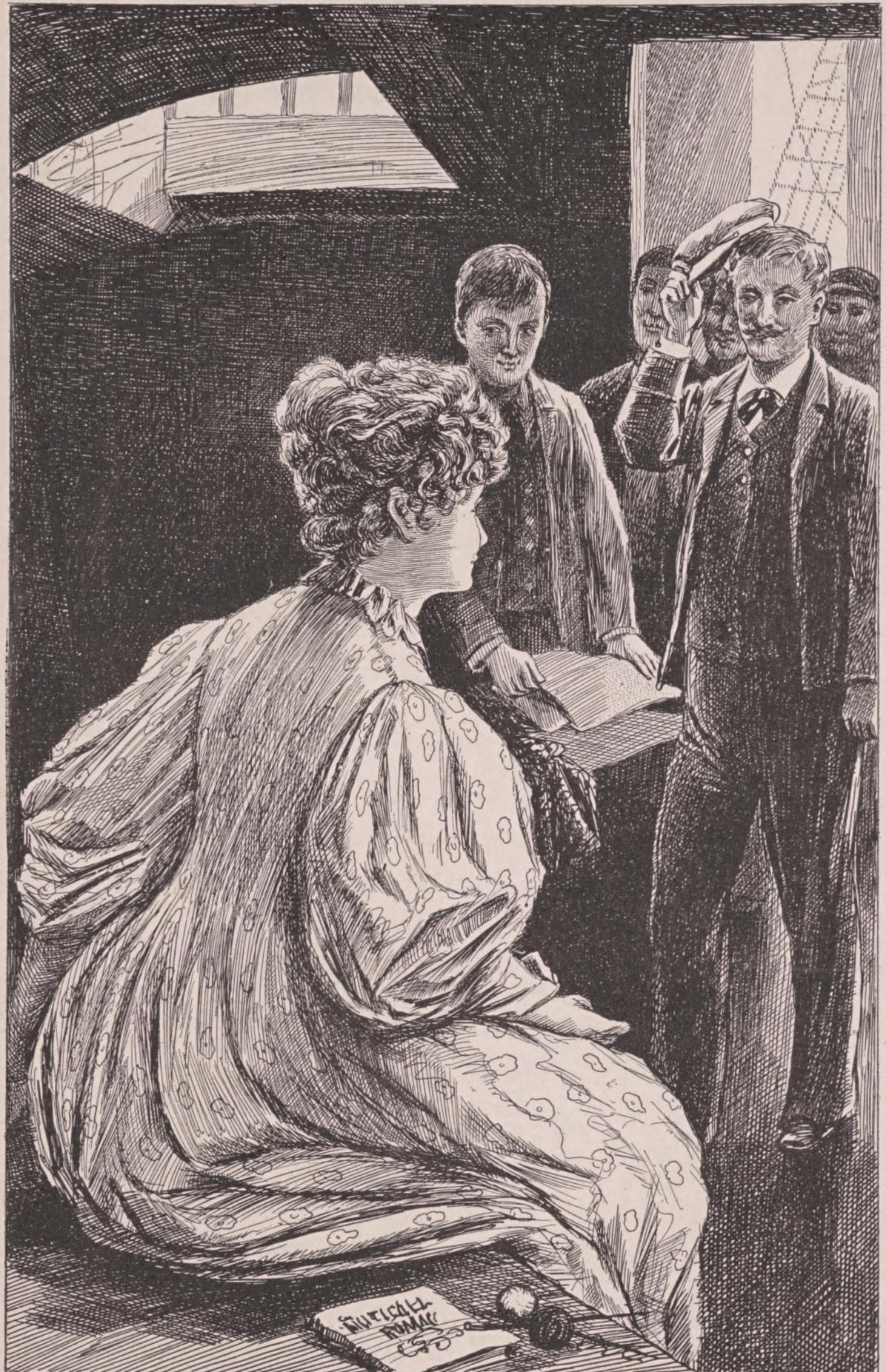
Ben had expected to be received with a certain degree of cordiality by the owners, but he was not at all prepared for that which actually did happen.

The Messrs. Pierce received him, when he entered their office, much as they would any other captain sailing in their employ, and waited patiently until he had told his story.

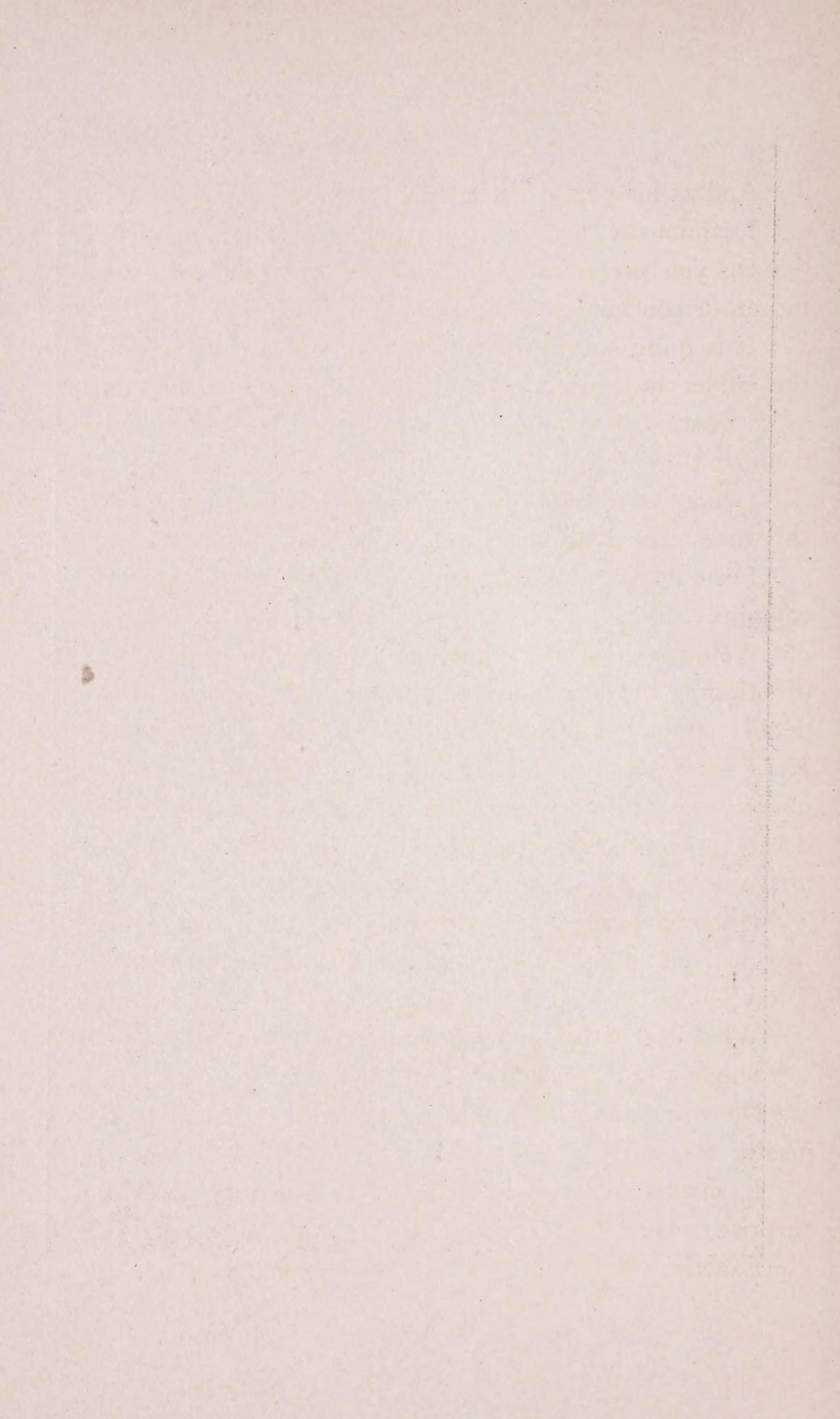
Ben was not one who would go into details regarding his own services, and on this occasion contented himself simply by repeating the actual events, touching lightly upon his own individual efforts. Then, as if bringing the brig short-handed and barely provisioned was nothing in itself to merit any praise, he handed them his own account with the vessel.

“So this is all you have to say, is it, Captain Thompson?” one of the gentlemen asked.

“Necessarily so, since that is really all there is to it. The brig is docked, and the consignees propose to break cargo this forenoon.”



“MRS. THOMPSON.”



“And as for yourself, captain, what are your plans?”

“I cannot say that I have anything definite in mind, sir.”

“Do you prefer to go back to the forecastle with your father, or continue in command of a vessel?”

“It is quite natural that after a fellow has got well up the ladder he should object to stepping down again, and, as a matter of course, I am in hopes to get another command.”

“I suppose the *Progressive Age* is too small for you by this time,” the gentleman said, with a smile.

“I should be only too well pleased, sir, to remain her captain.”

“Well, we think she is too small for you. Your story of bringing the brig home short-handed is very bare of detail; but, fortunately, our correspondents in Hong Kong have sent us full particulars by steamer. Consequently we know a great deal which your modesty evidently prevented you from telling. Your father should arrive within a few weeks at the latest.”

“I should say so, sir. He will come along faster than we did, and ought to have begun loading shortly after I left.”

“What do you think of the *Sportsman*? ”

“She is a remarkably nice little ship, sir.”

“Do you fancy you would be perfectly satisfied to be master of her? ”

“I, master of the *Sportsman*? ” Ben repeated, in surprise.

“Exactly. Your father will take command of a ship

which has just been launched, and even if you are rather young, we believe you to be the best man for our business. Therefore, if you have no objections to make, we shall consider you still in our employ, and you may hold yourself in readiness to take command of the ship as soon as your father arrives. You can retain any of your present crew that you choose."

"I should like Mr. Bean as my first mate, and to keep the two sailors who stood by me through the mutiny. On Miss Dunham's account, I think it will be best to hold on to the steward."

"On Miss Dunham's account?" Mr. Pierce said, looking up quickly, and then, noting the deepening colour on Ben's face, added, with a smile, "I can fancy that the *Sportsman* will have a passenger on board when she leaves port again, eh, captain?"

"Well, sir, if nothing happens," Ben replied, hesitatingly, "I am going to take my wife out with me."

"You are not married yet?"

"No, sir," Ben said, with a laugh; "but within the next two months I fancy there will be plenty of time for such business."

And so there was, for when the *Sportsman* left the port of New York again, standing on the quarter-deck by the side of the captain was the "child" whom Ben had first seen off Nampang Island, and Mr. Bean, chief officer of the *Sportsman*, addressed her as Mrs. Thompson.

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